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EMERSON — POET AND ESSAYIST

BY

RALPH C. PELTZ

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THESIS

FOR THE

DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

IN

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COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES

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THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

Ralph Cheney Peltz

ENTITLED Emerson - Poet and Essayist

IS APPROVED BY ME AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF Bachelor of Arts in English Literature

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## Chapter I

### Life and Character.

"How shall a man escape from his ancestors?" Emerson asks us; and indeed it seems that in his case, at least, all the influences of heredity are operative, for we find the descendant of eight generations of ministers engaged in the ministry, talking, lecturing, writing. Somewhere, however, there must have entered a strain producing characteristics not altogether amenable to the life of the usual New England minister. Emerson disagreed frequently and widely with his contemporaries, and as G. W. Cooke says in his book on Emerson's "Life, Writings and Philosophy," kept for himself only that which he considered best in the old faith: "Its doctrines had passed away, and left only its spiritual life behind."

Cooke goes on to say, in his chapter on Emerson's ancestry, that "Such an ancestry, physical and spiritual, is a promise of the richest culture, as it is of the finest natural powers. Emerson What He Owed to Ancestry has not only made good this promise, but added to it a remarkable genius and a unique spiritual insight. To his ancestry he owes much of the quality and direction of that genius, as well as the fine flavor and aroma of his character, and the rich spiritual grace of his thought. We may well propound his own question, 'How shall a man escape from his ancestors?' For we find in his books a confirmation of his declaration, that 'in different hours a man represents each of several of his ancestors, as if there were seven or eight of us rolled up in each other's skin,--seven or eight ancestors at least,--and they con-



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stitute the variety of notes for that new piece of music which his life is.' So we find him summing up and repeating, with a master's stroke of genius, the life and the thought of all his Puritan ancestors; which has been, in substance, the life and the thought of New England."

We are told further by Cooke that each of the eight ministerial predecessors of Ralph Waldo Emerson held positions of honor and note in religious thought, and that the summation of their thoughts and activities may well stand as a religious history of New England. It is not necessary, in this paper, to go into detail concerning the parts played by Emerson's forefathers in early colonial history; suffice it to say that each was alive to the spirit of the times, and advanced in his theology with the trend of religious thought of the day, so that, in the Emerson whom we are considering, we may well expect to find the sort of thinker whom we do find. All of the Emerson family, we are assured by Cooke, in his careful record

<u>Mingling of Characteristics</u>	of their early history, "were intellectual, eloquent, with a strong individuality of character, and robust and vigorous in their thinking. They were pious and devout, but also practical and philanthropic. More than fifty of the family have graduated at New-England colleges, and twenty have been ministers. His mother's family were noted for a remarkable spirituality of temperament, for great religious zeal, and were naturally mystics or pietists." The intellectuality and moral vigor of the one family, and the devoutness and mysticism of the other, were both inherited by Emerson. He was nurtured in the most spiritual phases of the old faith.
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Ralph Waldo Emerson was born in Boston, May 25, 1803. His father died while the boy was only seven years old. Upon the devout and loving mother, then, descended the responsibility of caring for her five sons,--William, Ralph Waldo, Edward Bliss, Peter Bulkeley, and Charles Chauncy. Rev. N. L. Frothingham, in The Christian Examiner for January, 1854, describes Emerson's mother as possessed of "great patience and fortitude, of the serenest trust in God, of a discerning spirit, and a most courteous bearing, one who knew how to guide the affairs of her own house, as long as Emerson's Mother she was responsible for that, with the sweetest authority, and knew how to give the least trouble and the greatest happiness after that authority was resigned. Both her mind and her character were of a superior order, and they set their stamp upon manners of peculiar softness and natural grace and quiet dignity. Her sensible and kindly speech was always as good as the best instruction; her smile, thought it was ever ready, was a reward. Her dark, liquid eyes, from which old age could not take away the expression, will be among the remembrances of all on whom they ever rested."

In the care of her sons, over whom she always exercised a pronounced influence, Mrs. Emerson was materially assisted, particularly spiritually, by Miss Mary Moody Emerson, the sister of her husband. Miss Emerson was one of those strong characters, decided in her opinions, yet with a gentleness and kindliness that did much to win the lasting love of her nephew. Emerson, throughout her life, made her his confidential correspondent, telling her of his hopes, plans, successes, failures. Even when he was a boy he wrote to her from



His Aunt and  
Confidante

school; and one finds in his Journals frequent references to her. Describing Miss Emerson, Mrs.

Samuel Ripley, in "Worthy Women of Our First Century," page 174, says that even in her old age she still retained "all the oddities and enthusiasms of her youth,--a person at war with society as to all its decorums," who "enters into conversation with everybody, and talks on every subject; is sharp as a razor in her satire, and sees you through and through in a moment. She has read, all her life, in the most miscellaneous way; and her appetite for metaphysics is insatiable. Alas for the victim in whose intellect she sees any promise! Descartes and his vortices, Leibnitz and his monads, Spinoza and his unica substantia, will prove it to the very core. But, notwithstanding all this, her power over the minds of her young friends was almost despotic. She heard of me, when I was sixteen years old, as a person devoted to books and a sick mother, sought me out in my garret without any introduction, and, though received at first with sufficient coldness, she did not give me up till she had enchained me entirely in her magic circle." Certainly

Miss Emerson's  
Influence

a woman of these characteristics might well be imagined as possessing and exerting a pronounced influence over the impressinnable boy, Emerson.

His aunt was in the way of being his literary counsellor, and often wrote to him regarding his early poetic attempts, in which he was greatly interested; and this interest of his aunt's was shared in no small degree by her intimate personal friend, Miss Sarah Bradford. When the boy Emerson was eleven years old, this friend of his aunt's is reported as having written him: "You love to trifle in rhyme a little now and then; why will you not complete this





versification of the fifth bucolic?" sending him a translation from Virgil. "You will answer two ends, or, as the old proverb goes, kill two birds with one stone,--improve in your Latin, as well as indulge a taste for poetry. Why can't you write me a letter in Latin? But Greek is your favorite language; epistola in lingua Graeca would be still better. All the honor will be on my part to correspond with a young gentleman in Greek. Tell me what most interests you in Rollin; in the wars of contending princes under whose banner you enlist, to whose cause you ardently wish success. Write me with what stories in Virgil you are most delighted." And,

The Boy as a  
Translator

the account given by Cooke goes on to say, the young schoolboy answered this letter, which would

be a strange one indeed to be written to the average eleven-year-old boy of today, with a poetic rendering of the fifth bucolic, from the nineteenth to the thirty-fifth line, a few verses of which, quoted, will serve to show admirably what was the skill of Emerson at that early day:

"Mop. Turn now, O youth! from your long speech away;  
The bower we've reached, recluse from sunny ray.  
The nymphs with pomp have mourned for Daphnis dead;  
The hazels witnessed, and the rivers fled.  
The wretched mother clasped her lifeless child,  
And gods and stars invoked in accents wild.  
Daphnis! the cows are not now led to streams  
Where the bright sun upon the water gleams;  
Neither do herds the cooling river drink,  
Nor crop the grass upon the verdant brink."

But while Emerson was thus exercising those powers and talents which were to make him later one of the most outstanding figures in American literature, how was he occupied in school? It seems that he had an apparent disregard for the ordinary, workaday studies of the curriculum, for he writes in "Spiritual Laws," in his first



series of essays, "The regular course of studies, the years of academical and professional education, have not yielded me better facts than some idle books under the bench at the Latin school. What we do not call education is more precious than that which we do call so."

From the Latin School Emerson went to Harvard college in his The Years at fourteenth year, and was graduated from that in-  
College stitution in 1821. During his four years at Har-  
vard, he took an active interest in literary affairs, and, as he was interested in oratory and declamation, bent his efforts in that direction, too, and won several prizes. It is amusing now to read what Josiah Quincy, a classmate and rival in declamation, said of Emerson after the valedictory exercises; Quincy wrote in his journal, July 16, 1821, "Attended a dissertation of Emerson's in the morning, on the subject of Ethical Philosophy. I found it long and dry." The next day, it is reported, Quincy went to the chapel, "where Barnwell and Emerson performed our valedictory exercises before all the scholars and a number of ladies. They were rather poor, and did but little honor to the class." Perhaps there was a tinge of semi-professional jealousy and prejudice in Quincy's remarks to his journal, for he had won first prize in a contest for the Bowdoin award, in which trial Emerson took second.

In 1823 Emerson began the study of theology, studying largely under Channing, who particularly attracted the young student because of his gentle, lovable spirit, the high purpose of his religious work, and the nobility of his thought. It was Channing's idea that God is made known to mortals only by such moral laws as





may be found within us, because he held, with some metaphysicians

Early Doubts of Formalism

of Europe, that man and God are one and the same in substance--One through nature. Through

contact with such a thinker, perhaps, and perhaps because it was his natural tendency, Emerson began at this time to entertain doubts as to the forms of religion. This doubt of his eventuated in his leaving the pulpit, although he was, we are told by Sanborn in Scribner's magazine for February, 1879, eloquent, simple and effective in the pulpit. In the latter part of 1832, some short years after he had been ordained, Emerson resigned his pastorate because

His Pastorate Resigned

he could not conscientiously conduct the usual communion service. His congregation offered to

let him believe his way, and they continue in theirs, so that he would retain his charge, wherein he was universally beloved, but he thought it best to resign. In a sermon which he preached at the time of his resignation, he set forth his ideas as to the forms of religion in this wise: (reported in Frothingham's History of New England Transcendentalism) "The whole world was full of idols and ordinances. The Jewish was a religion of forms. The Pagan was a religion of forms; it was all body,--it had no life,--and the Almighty God was pleased to qualify and send forth a man to teach men that they must serve him with the heart; that only that life was religious which was thoroughly good; that sacrifice was smoke, and forms were shadows. This man lived and died true to this purpose; and now, with his blessed word and life before us, Christians must contend that it is a matter of vital importance--really a duty--to commemorate him by a certain form, whether that form be agreeable to their understandings or not. Is not this to make vain the



gift of God? Is not this to turn back the hand on the dial? Is not this to make men--to make ourselves--forget that not forms, but duties--not names, but righteousness and love--are enjoined? and that, in the eye of God, there is no other measure of the value of any one form than the measure of its use?"

Following his resignation from the pulpit, Emerson travelled in Europe, where he had the pleasure of meeting many men in whom he was interested. It was while there that he gathered material for Travels in Europe his (later) essays on "Representative Men" and "English Traits." After his return from abroad, he spent much of his time in lecturing and in preparing material for publication. His first wife, Ellen Louisa Tucker, whom he had married in 1829, had died in 1832, and her death was a distinct shock to Emerson, who was in frail health at the time. However, his tour of Europe in some measure brought back his vigor; and upon his return, he preached for several months at the Unitarian church in New Bedford, but refused a call to settle there, in 1834. In the summer of that year he settled at "The Old Manse" in Concord, where he found an ideal place for study and meditation; and the fruits of those country-thoughts appeared the next year, when he began a course of lectures in Boston. This first real lecture course was biographical, and treated of Luther, Milton, Burke, Michael Angelo, and Fox. All these lectures, together with the introductory remarks on the value of biography, were published, and added to his growing popularity.

In September, 1835, Emerson married Lydia Jackson, and, with Beginning A Career her and his mother, settled in the home on the Cambridge turnpike, in Concord, where he lived the





remainder of his life. 1835 marks the date of the real beginning of Emerson's lecturing and essay-writing career; and in addition, he turned to studies from which most of his writings on idealism were derived. He took up the study of Plato with renewed interest, and also read in the works of the German and English idealists.

Transcendentalism was just beginning to attract the radicals of the day, and to it Emerson turned. Throughout his life, however, he resented the use of the term "transcendentalist," as reported by E. D. Mead in "The Influence of Emerson," "Transcendentalism is

Interest in  
Transcendentalism

the popular term for the philosophy of

Emerson, with those who recognize that he

had a philosophy. Men call him a Transcendentalist, as they called him and his friends sixty years ago. He did not like the term, and thought that most people who used it knew little about what it meant. As commonly used by the intelligent man sixty years ago or now, and as accepted by Emerson, it is simply another word for Idealist.

"What is popularly called Transcendentalism among us," he said himself, in the midst of the Transcendental movement in New England, "is Idealism,--Idealism as it appears in 1842." "The Idealism of the present day," he said, "acquired the name of Transcendental

from the use of that term by Immanuel Kant, of Königsberg, who replied to the sceptical philosophy of Locke, which insisted that there was nothing in the intellect which was not previously in the

Emerson and  
Idealism

experience of the senses, by showing that there

was a very important class of ideas, or imperative

forms, which did not come by experience, but through which experience was acquired; that these were intuitions of the mind itself;



and he denominated them Transcendental forms. The extraordinary profoundness and precision of that man's thinking have given vogue to his nomenclature, in Europe and America, to that extent, that whatever belongs to the class of intuitive thought is popularly called at the present day Transcendental."

The interest which Emerson had in Transcendentalism, or in Idealism under whatever name, continued; and he was an ardent supporter of the various clubs and schools of the idealistic thought, and also was one of the Brook Farm experimenters. However, he did not "go in" for the movement as strongly as did some others, having many other interests, among which literature was steadily growing. Meantime he was continuing his lectures; and gave in Boston in 1838-9 a course on "The Resources of the Present Age." Two of the lectures in this course dealt with literature; others were "Private Life," "Reformers," "Religion," "Ethics," "Education;"-- followed Lecture Courses the next year by a course on "Human Life," in which he took up "The Laws of Love," "Home," "The School," "Genius," "The Protest," "Tragedy", "Comedy," "Duty," "Demonology." From this time on, the Emerson whom all who read American literature's masterpieces know, came into the being as he is usually seen; and it is unnecessary to follow the long course of lecturing and writing that ensued. Poetry occupied a part of his time, and original writing some; but the larger part of his work was in lecturing, his lectures afterward being prepared for publication. His fame increased abroad as rapidly as it did in America, until the position which he has been rightfully accorded was assured.





Chapter II

## The Journals

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"These journals are reflections, sometimes dim, sometimes clear, of the inner life as stirred by the outer.....Throughout, and increasingly in later years, these are journals, not of incidents and persons, but of thoughts."

--E.W.Emerson, Introduction to Annotated Journals.

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An accurate insight into the life and thought of Emerson is obtained by studying his Journals, kept for more than fifty years. It is true that an analysis of his writings goes a long way toward giving one an understanding of the motivation of Emerson's thought, and of his beliefs, doubts, prejudices; but in many cases, particularly in the essays, the finished writings have been "purged of personality," as Edward W. Emerson, his son and literary executor, says. It follows, then, that only by reading the Journals, to which were confided the hopes, plans, desired, literary ambitions of Emerson from the age of seventeen onward, can one come to know the man as he really was, and trace his thoughts in the making.

It is rare that a man keeps a record of his thoughts as full and accurate as that which Emerson kept in his Journals. There is

Intimate Record  
Of His Thoughts

the almost inevitable tendency to make a diary,

if it is to be kept continuously, a literary work; or, if it is not to be a literary work, and is not consciously designed for that by its writer, then it has too many breaks, too many omissions, to be of real value in studying the man. But neither of these faults mars Emerson's Journals. He wrote in them with a surprising regularity, and he probably with-



held little. He did not endeavor to make a literary masterpiece of his diary, but set down from day to day his activities and thoughts, serious or trivial, from early boyhood to old age. As a result, a study of the Journals is singularly valuable to the student of Emerson. By reading what he wrote in his seventeenth year, we can see why some of his essays, written in middle age, are what they are. An evidence of character or tendency in youth points the way to the principle of the man.

As Edward Emerson says of the early Journals, they do not show merit alone: "They show the soil out of which Emerson grew, the atmosphere around, his habits and mental food, his doubts, his steady, earnest purpose, and the things he outgrew. His frankness with himself is seen, and how he granted the floor to the adversary for a fair hearing. Also the ups and downs of the boy's health appear in the school-keeping days, and why, beyond all reasonable hope, considering the neglect of the body, he lived to a healthy middle life and old age by his rambling tendencies, by quietness, and bending to the blast which shattered the health of his more unyielding brothers." Certainly writings which will tell us all of this contain a great deal! But as it is the primary purpose of this paper to consider Emerson's writings rather than to peer into his private life, social activities, or family relationships, this phase of his Journal entries may be passed over lightly.

What we are mainly concerned with, in studying his Journals, is to see what evidence there is in the earlier of the volumes of habits of thought

Evidence of  
Habits of Thought

The Journals  
Tell of the Man





literary plans, and flashes of genius which later develop into his finished works as the world knows them. For instance, to quote further from the admirable introduction to the annotated Journals by Edward Emerson: "In these years (Emerson's youth) the young Emerson was reading eagerly and widely, and learned to find what the author or the college text-book had for him, and leave the rest. The growth of his literary taste, his style, independence of thought, and originality in writing verse can be traced.....It was Mr.

Emerson's habit often in later years to copy into his journal

<u>Natural to Him</u> <u>To Write</u>	passages from his letters to others in which he had conveyed his thought with care.....
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It was as natural to this boy to write as to another to play ball, or go fishing, or experiment with the tools of a neighbour carpenter, or feel out tunes on a musical instrument. When recitations were over, and study did not press, or he was not walking in Mount Auburn woods or the wild country around Fresh Pond, he betook himself to his journal. It was his confidential friend; his ambitions, his disappointments, his religious meditations, his mortifications, his romantic imaginings, his sillinesses, his trial-flights in verse, his joy in Byron and Scott, or Everett's orations, the ideas gathered from serious books,--all went in, everything but what might be expected in a boy's diary; for of incidents, of classmates, of students' doings, there is hardly an entry. Throughout, and increasingly in later years, these are journals, not of in-

<u>"Thought Takes Its</u> <u>Own Direction"</u>	cidents and persons, but of thoughts. With the biography of Mr. Emerson in mind or in hand, the outward conditions, or relations with people or
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public events which suggested a train of thought, may perhaps be found. A talk, or ramble with a friend, or the reading of a book, may be mentioned, but soon the thought takes its own direction. More often the thoughts were on the great, the abiding questions."

An example of the tendency mentioned just above is perhaps advantageous here. For instance, he wrote in Journal XII, December 13, 1823; "Edinburgh Review has a fine eulogy of Newton and Dr. Black, etc., in the first article of the 3d Volume. No. xxxvi contains a review of Mrs. Grant on Highlanders, and, in it, good thoughts upon the progress of Manners. "A gentleman's character is a compound of obligingness and self-esteem." The same volume reviews Alison, and gives an excellent condensed view of his theory. The charm of all these discussions is only a fine luxury, producing scarce any good, unless that of substituting a pure pleasure for impure. Occasionally this reading helps one's conversation, but seldom. The reason and whole mind is not forwarded by it, as by history. The good in life that seems to be most REAL, is not found in reading, but in those successive triumphs a man achieves over habits of moral or intellectual indolence, or over an ungenerous Spirit and mean propensities."

Enough has perhaps been said in Chapter I, dealing with Emerson's life, concerning his aunt, Miss Mary Emerson. The boy wrote often to her; and she, in turn, responded with letters which her correspondent copied into his Journals. It is sufficient, in A Letter from His Aunt this connection, to quote part of a letter from her, recorded in Journal V, January 12, 1822, when Emerson was eighteen years old: "When that spell which can





only be felt is thrown over the soul by the magic of genius, 'Now lettest thou thy servant depart where all is boundless genius--or let us tarry forever in this grave, if thus illuminated, ' is the adoring language of the heart. Is it not a well know principle of human nature that moments of enthusiasm can produce sacrifices which demand no proportionate virtue to those which never pretend to fame?"....

I shall delay until the conclusion of this chapter consideration of the strictly literary phases of the Journals, feeling that the proper place for material of this nature is in juxtaposition to the ensuing chapter, which deals with some of the literary products of Emerson's later life. Here, then, it is also appropriate to look at some of those pages of the Journals whereon we find recorded some of the "reflections, sometimes dim, sometimes clear, of the inner life as stirred by the outer." Religion, in some one of its manifold phases, was ever near Emerson's heart; his thoughts turned to it with frequency in boyhood, early manhood, and old age. This is, of course, what might be expected, I feel that the consideration of some of his thoughts anent religious matters in this place will serve as introductory matter for the following chapter, wherein are discussed his more personal poems--those in which the keynote is religion and the self.

A progressive, chronological system of quotations from the Journals, touching upon religion, is, of course, unthinkable; Little Change in Religious Ideas for to attempt this would be to render this chapter unwieldy. However, I have carefully



selected passages from one of the earliest of the Journals (V) written when Emerson was eighteen, and from his Journal xxxvi, written in 1845, when he was forty-one years old. The surprising feature in the comparison is that one of such youth should be able to express ideas which are seen to be so little changed in essence nearly fifty years later. Emerson says, in Journal V: "The invisible connections between heaven and earth, the solitary principle which unites intellectual beings to an account and makes of men moral beings religion--is distinct and peculiar, alike in its origin and in its end, from all other relations. It is essential to the Universe. You seek in vain to contemplate the order of things apart from its existence. You can no more banish this than you can separate from yourself the notions of Space and Duration.

"Encompassing  
Presence of Deity"

Through all the perverse mazes and shadows of infidelity the Light still makes itself visible, until the reluctant mind shudders to acknowledge the eternal encompassing presence of Deity. If you can abstract it from the Universe, the Soul is bewildered by a system of things of which no account can be given; instances of tremendous power--and no hand found to form them; a thousand creations in a thousand spheres all pointing upward to a single point--and no object there to see and receive--it is all a vast anomaly. Restore Religion and you give to those energies a sublime object."

Everyone knows of Emerson's inability to allow himself to be led by the blind formalism of the times; and his remarks in Journal xxxvi, below, definitely show what he thought of this matter, which was always of the highest importance to him:





Dislike of  
Formalism

"Vestiges of Creation". What is so ungodly as these polite bows to God in English books? He is always mentioned in the most respectful and deprecatory manner, "that august," "that almighty," "that adorable providence," etc., etc. But courage only will the Spirit prompt or accept. Everything in this Vestiges of Creation is good, except the theology, which is civil, timid, and dull. These things which the author so well collates ought to be known only to few, and those, masters and poets."

One who knows Emerson would not be led to think that he is sacrilegious, or even irreligious; and certainly no doubt at all remains after reading what he has to say regarding worship, some

Worship Is  
Essential

few pages further in the same Journal referred to in connection with the passage quoted just above:

"Worship is the height of rectitude. "The world is no place for the man who doth not worship, and where, O Arjoun! is there another?" Worship, because the sailor and the ship and the sea are of one stuff; worship, because, though the bases of things are divided, yet the summits are united; because not by thy private, but by they public and universal force canst thou share and so know the nature of things. Worship, because that is the difference between genius and talent; between poetry and prose; between Imagination and Fancy. The poet is like

.....the vaulters in the circus round  
Who step from horse to horse, but never touch the  
ground."

Turning now from the broad generalities of religion, which after all is in the abstract, what did Emerson think of the





practical phase of the same subject-matter? How apply it to the  
Ideas Concerning problems of life? What is the meaning of  
Man's Life character? Hear Emerson (Journal xxxvi):

"We do not live an equal life, but on of contrasts and patchwork; now a little joy, then a sorrow, now a sin, then a generous or brave action. We must always be little whilst we have these alternations. Character is regular and homogeneous. Our world, it is true, is like us; it has many weathers, here a shade and there a rainbow; here gravel and there a diamond; polar ice, then temperate zone, then torrid; now a genius, then a good many mediocre people.

"Alas! Our Penetration increases as we grow older, and we are no longer deceived by great words when unrealized and unembodied. Say rather, we detect littleness in expressions and thoughts that once we should have taken and cited as proofs of strength."

And this: "....I am forced to remember the clock, and regret  
Eternity and how much time is passing, and if I spend any hour  
Time upon any history of facts, I think on this loss; but if you bring me a thought; if you bring me a law; if I contemplate an idea, I no longer count the hours. This is of the Eternity which is the generator of Time."

It seems to me that the keynote of Emerson's idea of the relationship of man-life-God, as expressed in the Journals, is struck in the following passage, also chosen from the Journal he kept in 1845; "Life is a game between God and man. The one disparts himself and feigns to divide into individuals. He puts

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Beauty Not  
Alien to Us

part in a pomegranate, part in a king's crown,  
part in a person. Instantly man sees the beau-

tiful things and goes to procure them. As he takes down each one the Lord smiles and says, "It is yourself; and when he has them all, it will be yourself. We live and die for a beauty which we wronged ourselves in thinking alien."

Returning to selections from the Journals which refer more directly to the subject matter of this paper--the consideration of Emerson's literary procedure--I refer again to the example quoted showing his facility in turning from mere remark of a critical nature upon something he has heard or read, to the development of an idea of his own. We saw there how he drifted from remarks on the Edinburgh Review to "The good in life that seems to be most REAL, is not found in reading, but in those successive triumphs a man achieves over habits of moral or intellectual indolence, or over an ungenerous Spirit and mean propensities."

The foregoing passage is amply illustrative of Emerson's discursive faculty; but passages such as the above were by no means the only sort he put in his Journals. When he found a new word which attracted him, or a poetic phrase, he carefully noted it down for use at some future time. A striking example of this habit of his to use his "musical eyes" as he once referred to his ability to perceive the poetic word, is contained in Journal I, where he wrote, in January, 1820, the following list: "For use--phrases poetical,--rescuing and crowning virtue. "oldest complexion of age." ill-conditioned. cameleon. zeal. booked in alphabet. cushioned. com-

"For Use--  
Phrases Poetical"





punction. beleaguered. halidom. galloping. whortleberry. spikenard. staunch. council-chamber. star-crossed. till its dye was doubled on the crimson cross. countless multitudes. abutments. panoply. sycophant smile. kidnapping. beheaded. demigods. signal (adjective.) Cleopatra. ambidexter. register (verb.) defalcation." Truly, a boy of sixteen, who sought out and wrote down for safe-keeping such a variety of words and phrases might be expected to produce meritorious works with a little maturity.

But, before passing on to a consideration of Emerson's works, we may well ask, Whence these words? The answer is given in those Evidences of Wide Reading parts of the early Journals wherein Emerson wrote down lists of books "to be sought". An examination of the following list, written when he was seventeen (August 24, 1820) will serve to show why and how the young Emerson found such words as he put down "for use": "Wordsworth's Recuse; Quarterly Review, September, 1819; Liber VIII, of Buchanan's Scotland--Wallace; Spenser's View of the State of Ireland; Camden's Annals of Queen Elizabeth; Kennet's Life and Characters of Greek Poets; Hody, De Illustribus Graecis; Middleton's Cicer<sup>us</sup>; Burton's Melancholy; Barrow's Sermons; Hobbes' Leviathan; Joinville's Life of St. Louis; Froissart's History of England; Chaucer's Works; Bayle's Dictionnaire; Corinne; Massinger's Plays; Fletcher's do; Bentley's Phalaris; Peter's Letters; Letters from Eastern States; Waverley; Cogan On the Passions; Sir Charles Grandison." The foregoing is but part of a long list of books referred to in his early journals, but it is needless, for our purposes, to extend it.

Evidence enough has been given, for the purposes of this



paper, to show the nature of Emerson's Journals, and to prove their value to him who would understand the development of Emerson's thought; but it is impracticable to endeavor here to trace some of

Understanding of  
Emerson through  
The Journals

the phases of that development, as such an undertaking would constitute a book larger

than the entire present one. Briefly summarizing, then, Emerson's Journals portray the activities of the mind of the man, from youth to old age; his interests are shown in them, and strong hints of the writings and lectures to come are seen in all numbers of the Journals, from the earliest to the last written.



Chapter III

## Poems of the Inner Man

-0-

"Right upward on the road of fame  
 With sounding steps the poet came:  
 Born and nourished in miracles,  
 His feet were shod with golden bells,  
 Or where he stepped the soil did peal  
 As if the dust were glass and steel."  
 --"The Poet," I.

--0--

Emerson had the highest opinion of poetry and of the place of the poet in life; and he felt that poetry had an actual and appreciable effect upon life, in spite of the fact that it has often been declared by some to be useless or serving for amusement only. In his Journal XV, January 23, 1825, Emerson says: "Poetry, wise women have said, hath a noble inutility, and is loved, as the flowers of the field, because not the necessaries, but the luxuries

Emerson's Opinion  
Of Poetry

of life; yet I observe it has sometimes  
 deigned to mix in the most important influences that act on society. The revolutionary spirit in this cold and prudential country, it is said, was kept alive and energized in 1776 by the seasonable aid of patriotic songs and satirical ballads pointing at well-known names and acts. Of Tyrtaeus and his conquering elegies who has not heard? And Greek history has another more extraordinary instance to the purpose, When Lycurgus meditated the introduction into Sparta of his unprecedented political model, he prevailed upon Thales, whom he met as he travelled in Asia Minor, to pass to Laconia and compose poems there of such a character as to prepare the mind of his country-





men for the novel schemes of the Reformer."

How men are influenced by poetry, and what the place of the poet is in the world of workaday people, Emerson tells us in his essay on "The Poet," wherein he says: "But the highest minds of the world have never ceased to explore the double meaning, or, shall I say, the quadruple, or the centuple, or much more manifold meaning, of every sensuous fact: Orpheus, Empedocles, Heraclitus, Plato, Plutarch, Dante, Swedenborg, and the masters of sculpture, picture and poetry. For we are not pans and barrows, nor even porters of the fire and torch-bearers, but children of the fire, made of it, and only the same divinity transmuted, and at two or three removes, when we know least about it. And this hidden truth, that the fountains whence all this river of Time, and its creatures, flows, are intrinsically ideal and beautiful, draws us on to the consideration of the nature and functions of the Poet, or the man of Beauty, to the means and materials he used, and to the general aspect of his art in the present time.

The breadth of the problem is great, for the poet is representative. He stands among partial men for the complete man, and apprises us not of his wealth, but of the common-wealth. The young

What the Poet      man reveres men of genius, because, to speak  
Does for Us      truly, they are more himself than he is. They

receive of the soul as he also receives, but they more. Nature enhances her beauty, to the eye of loving men, from their belief that the poet is beholding her shows at the same time. He is isolated among his contemporaries, by truth and by his art, but with this consolation in his pursuits, that they will draw all men



sooner or later. For all men live by truth, and stand in need of expression. In love, in art, in avarice, in politics, in labour, in games, we study to utter our painful secret. The man is only half himself, the other half is his expression."

Truly, a large task is outlined for the poet by Emerson; his duty, his place in the world, is high; but how is he to achieve it? The poet's work is one of the commonest, and at the same time most difficult, expressions of art. The thing to learn then, so far as the poet is concerned, is his expression of art. Emerson would

#### The Poet and His Methods

have us know that the poet, by properly making use of his art, can create and enhance beauty for us, can make the common man see the nobler things in life, can inspire him to great deeds, can incite or speed revolutions. What should art be, or do? Should it be photographic, and record in imperishable stone or the master's canvas the colors of a sunset which delighted us, or a form we cherish in imagination? Should it imprison in the sculptured marble, either real or that of phrases, the fleeting expression we fain would keep? Emerson does not think so; indeed, in his essay on "Art," he goes so far as to say that art must be new, original: "Thus in our fine arts, not imitation, Create, not Imitate but creation is the aim. In landscapes, the painter should give the suggestion of a fairer creation than we know. The details, the prose of nature, he should omit, and give us only the spirit and splendour." That the artist, or poet, may not fail in his mission, he is warned by Emerson, in the same essay, "But the artist must employ the symbols in use in his day and nation to convey his enlarged sense to his fellow-men.





Thus the new in art is always formed out of the old. The Genius of the Hour always sets his ineffaceable seal on the work, and gives it an inexpressible charm for the imagination."

What Emerson thought of the poet in general, and of poetry in the abstract, he thought of his own. Postulated theories became his methods, as is well shown in his poetical writings. As nearly as man could, he followed out the plan laid down.

Truly we should expect to get from a man who regarded poetry as capable of political influence, compositions which showed this belief. But it is not alone in his belief in the vital force of poetry in regard to external things and such events as revolutions, that Emerson's opinion of poetry may be found. He did regard this Muse as capable of wielding a powerful influence in that way, but he felt that the real strength and purpose of poetry was found elsewhere; and that the poet must seek for his inspiration in other places than the conflicts between nations, if his verse were to ring true and noble. He says: "Poetry had better drink at immortal fountains." (Journal XV. January 4, 1825.) Previous to this time,

Poetry Derived  
From Immortal  
Fountains of Nature

Emerson had written in his Journal V,

January 12, 1822, his belief that poetry

is derived from Nature--that Nature which

is always so intimate a part of Emerson himself--and that "Its images are nothing but the striking occurrences selected from Nature and Art and clothed in an artful combination of sounds.....But poetical expression constitutes to half the world the beauty of poetry, and in this it seems to resemble Algebra, for both make language an instrument and depend solely upon it without having any abstracted use." Of course it would be possible for a writer working with



tenet in mind, to say things that had little or no meaning; to write in beautiful language poems whose beauty was on the surface only; but Emerson felt that mere verbal ornamentation of thoughts which in themselves are of little value, was not the sort of poetry which makes its strongest appeal to him who is searching for a higher criticism of life. In exposition of this view, he writes: "Poetical expression serves to embellish dull thoughts, but we love better to follow the poet, when the muse is so ethereal and the thought so sublime that language sinks beneath it." (Journal V, January 12, 1822.)

When this muse is so ethereal and the thought of such sublimity, then, Emerson believes, the poet probably attains to his Mankind in goal, which is putting mankind in har-  
Harmony with Nature mony with Nature, with God. In a letter to his aunt, dated June 15, 1826, the young poet wrote: "It would seem there was some kindred between this new philosophy of poetry and the undisciplined enterprises of intellect in the middle age. The geniuses of that era, all on fire with that curiosity which is, in every age, inextinguishable, to break the marble silence of Nature and open some intercourse between man and that divinity with which it seems instinct, struggled to grasp the principles of things, to extort from the spheres in the firmament some intimations of the present or some commentary on the past. They were impatient of their straitened dominion over nature, and were eager to explore the secrets of her own laboratory, that they might refine clay and iron into gold, might lengthen life and deduce formulas Poets Always for the solution of all those mysteries that  
The Same





besiege the human adventurer. Not otherwise this modern poet, by natural humour an ardent lover of all the enchantments of wood and river and seduced by an overweening confidence in the force of his own genius, has discarded that modesty under whose influence all his great precursors have resorted to external nature sparingly for illustration and ornament, and have forbore to tamper with the secret and metaphysical nature of what they borrowed."

It may seem a little odd that a poet should be thus likened to the alchemists in search of the philosopher's stone; but after all, the poet probes the realm of mind in as analytical a manner, if he writes as Emerson often does, as ever did one of the magicians of the middle ages seek in his crucible for the transmutable metal.

How, then, if one is to "break the marble silence of Nature" and "extort from the spheres in the firmament some intimations of the present or some commentary on the past" shall the poet work? What must be the qualifications of the man who has this huge task

Genius Required  
For Poetry

before him? "It would seem," Emerson says in this same letter to his confidante,

"that the genuine bard must be one in whom the extremes of human genius meet; that his judgment must be as exact and level with life as his imagination is discursive and incalculable. It would seem as if abundant erudition, foreign travel, and gymnastic exercises must be annexed to his awful imagination and fervent piety to finish Milton; that the boisterous childhood, care<sup>less</sup> of criticism and poetry, the association of vulgar and unclean companions, were necessary to balance the towering spirit of Shakespeare, and that Mr. Wordsworth has failed of pleasing by being too much a poet."





The poet has difficulties in going direct to Nature to draw  
"Go to Nature                      his inspiration; that marble silence is often  
For the Source"                      Sphinx-like; yet the poet is adjured not to  
 give to the world "The fancies found in books," in "Waldeinsamkeit,"  
 a poem which sets forth clearly the principles quoted above:

## WALDEINSAMKEIT

I do not count the hours I spend  
 In wandering by the sea;  
 The forest is my loyal friend,  
 Like God it useth me.

In plains that room for shadows make  
 Of skirting hills to lie,  
 Bound in by streams which give and take  
 Their colors from the sky.

Or on the mountain-crest sublime,  
 Or down the oaken glade,  
 O what have I to do with time?  
 For this the day was made.

Cities of mortals woe-begone  
 Fantastic care derides,  
 But in the serious landscape lone  
 Stern benefit abides.

Sheen will tarnish, honey cloy,  
 And merry is only a mask of sad,  
 But, sober on a fund of joy,  
 The woods at heart are glad.

There the great Planter plants  
 Of fruitful worlds the grain,  
 And with a million spells enchants  
 The souls that walk in pain.

Still on the seeds of all he made  
 The rose of beauty burns;  
 Through times that wear and forms that fade,  
 Immortal youth returns.

The black ducks mounting from the lake,  
 The pigeon in the pines,  
 The bittern's boom, a desert make  
 Which no false art refines.



Down in yon watery nook,  
 Where bearded mists divide,  
 The gray old gods whom Chaos knew,  
 The sires of Nature, hide.

Aloft, in secret veins of air,  
 Blows the sweet breath of song,  
 O, few to scale those uplands dare,  
 Though they to all belong!

See thou bring not to field or stone  
 The fancies found in books;  
 Leave authors' eyes, and fetch your own,  
 To brave the landscape's looks.

Oblivion here they wisdom is,  
 They thrift, the sleep of cares;  
 For a proud idleness like this  
 Crowns all they mean affairs.

Emerson would have us understand that if the poet is to know

The "Eternal  
 Questioning"

life, he must face the Sphinx, whose eternal  
 questionings the spirit often quails before,

yet which it must answer in order to gain the key to life's estate;  
 and just as "Waldeinsamkeit" carried a note of the writer's reverence in the stanza;

There the great Planter plants  
 Of fruitful worlds the grain,  
 And with a million spells enchants  
 The souls that walk in pain

so, too, does "The Sphinx" give evidence of Emerson's attitude toward Nature, the epitome of religious thought, the manifestation of God everywhere:

THE SPHINX

The Sphinx is drowsy,  
 Her wings are furled;  
 Her ear is heavy,  
 She broods on the world.  
 "Who'll tell me my secret,  
 The ages have kept?--  
 I awaited the seer  
 While they slumbered and slept:--





"The fate of the man-child,  
 The meaning of man;  
 Known fruit of the unknown;  
 Daedalian plan;  
 Out of sleeping a waking,  
 Out of waking a sleep;  
 Life death overtaking;  
 Deep underneath deep?

"Erect as a sunbeam,  
 Unspringeth the palm;  
 The elephant browses,  
 Undaunted and calm;  
 In beautiful motion  
 The thrush plies his wings;  
 Kind leaves of his covert,  
 Your silence he sings.

"The waves, unashamed,  
 In difference sweet,  
 Play glad with the breezes,  
 Old playfellows meet;  
 The journeying atoms,  
 Primordial wholes,  
 Firmly draw, firmly drive,  
 By their animate poles.

"Sea, earth, air, sound, silence,  
 Plant, quadruped, bird,  
 By one music enchanted,  
 One deity stirred,--  
 Each othe other adorning,  
 Accompany still;  
 Night veileth the morning,  
 The vapor the hill.

"The babe by its mother  
 Lies bathed in joy;  
 Glide its hours uncounted,--  
 The sun is its toy;  
 Shines the peace of all being,  
 Without cloud, in its eyes;  
 And the sun of the world  
 In soft miniature lies.

"But man crouches and blushes,  
 Absconds and conceals;  
 He creepeth and peepeth,  
 He palter and steals;  
 Infirm, melancholy,  
 Jealous glancing around.  
 And oaf, an accomplice,  
 He poisons the ground.



"Out spoke the great mother,  
 Beholding his fear:--  
 At the sound of her accents  
 Cold shuddered the sphere:--  
 'Who has drugged my boy's cup?  
 Who has mixed my boy's bread?  
 Who, with sadness and madness,  
 Has turned my child's head?'"

I heard a poet answer  
 Aloud and cheerfully,  
 "Say on, sweet Sphinx! thy dirges  
 Are pleasant songs to me.  
 Deep love lieth under  
 These pictures of time;  
 They fade in the light of  
 Their meaning sublime.

"The fiend that man harries  
 Is love of the Best;  
 Yawns the pit of the Dragon,  
 Lit by rays from the Blest.  
 The Lethe of Nature  
 Can't trance him again,  
 Whose soul sees the perfect,  
 Which his eyes seek in vain.

"To vision profounder,  
 Man's spirit must dive;  
 His eye-rolling orb  
 At no goal will arrive;  
 The heavens that now draw him  
 With sweetness untold,  
 Once found,--for new heavens  
 He sourneth the old.

"Pride ruined the angels,  
 Their shame them restores;  
 Lurks the joy that is sweetest  
 In stings of remorse,  
 Have I a lover  
 Who is noble and free?  
 I would he were nobler  
 Than to love me.

"Eterne alternation  
 Now follows, how flies;  
 And under pain, pleasure,--  
 Under pleasure, pain lies.  
 Love works at the centre,  
 Heart-heaving alway;  
 Forth speed the strong pulses  
 To the borders of day.



"Dull Sphinx, keep they five wits;  
 They sight is growing blear;  
 Rue, myrrh and commin for the Sphinx,  
 Her muddy eyes to clear!"  
 The old Sphinx bit her thick lip,--  
 Said, "Who taught thee me to name?  
 I am thy spirit, yoke-fellow,  
 Of think eye I am eyebeam."

"Thou art the unanswered question;  
 Couldst see they proper eye,  
 Always it asketh, asketh;  
 And each answer is a lie.  
 So take they quest through nature,  
 It through thousand natures ply;  
 Ask on, thou clothed eternity;  
 Time is the false reply."

Uprose themerry Sphinx,  
 And crouched no more in stone;  
 She melted into purple cloud,  
 She silvered in the moon;  
 She spired into a yellow flame;  
 She flowered in blossoms red;  
 She flowed into a foaming wave;  
 She stood Monadnoc's head.

Thorough a thousnad voices  
 Spoke the universal dame;  
 "Who telleth one of my meanings,  
 Is master of all I am."

"The Sphinx" is almost as cryptic a poem as "Brahma;" and  
 Emerson, the both are philosophical. Emerson is distinctly  
Lyric Poet a lyric poet--a poet of individual lines, of  
 moods, whims, a moment's caprice; and lyrics and philosophy may  
 seem somewhat incongruous, the one requiring no sustained or  
 progressive thought, the other necessitating the closest attention  
 to the development of an idea. He himself says, regarding his  
 lyric-philosophy, in which unique combination he has succeeded by  
 sheer merit, "What is poetry? It is philosophy, it is humour, it  
 is a chime of two or three syllables, it is a relation of thought  
 to things, or language to thought. It converses with all science





and all imagination, with all accidents and all objects, from the

"I Would Go  
Far for Truth"

grandest that are accessible to the senses,  
and grander than those, to the coarsest parts

of life. And I would go to the farthest edge of the green earth to learn what it was or was not. If the spirit of him who paced the Academe and had this virtue in his soul, though he feigned to disparage it in his philosophy, or the laurelled lovers of the British Muse, harp in hand, sit on your musty mount, or soothe their majesties by the margin of your lakes, conjure them, I beseech you, to announce this secret that the wit of humanity has been so long in vain toiling to unriddle." (Letter to Miss Emerson, June 15, 1826.)

One of the chief elements in Emerson's philosophy is his attitude toward love, as indicated above in "The Sphinx" where the man replying to the Sphinx says:

Have I a lover  
Who is noble and free?  
I would he were nobler  
Than to love me.

and Emerson develops this idea in a number of his poems, in greater or less degree. Notable among these poems are "Erose", "Give All to Love", and the tri-partite poem "Initial, Daemonic, and Celestial Love." The latter is but the lyric twin of his essay on "Love", in which the subject is treated in almost exactly the same manner: the two others, "Eros" and "Give All to Love," stand out more individually as poems. "Eros" is short, and in some respects resembles the conventionalized sonnet or lyric on love:

#### EROS

The sense of the world is short,--  
Long and various the report,--



To love and be beloved;  
 Men and gods have not outlearned it;  
 And, how oft soe'er they've turned it,  
 Not to be improved.

This, however, hardly represents in a perfectly fair manner Emerson's attitude toward love, which is perhaps best shown, with the exception of the long poetical treatise on the three kinds of love, in "Give All to Love," which portrays Emerson's ideas as being more than sentimental, and his presentation more than that of the erotic sonneteer of Elizabethan days; there is, Emerson would have us understand, a reason for the optative remark: "I would he were nobler than to love me":

#### GIVE ALL TO LOVE

Give all to love;  
 Obey thy heart;  
 Friends, kindred, days,  
 Estate, good-fame,  
 Plans, credit and the Muse,--  
 Nothing refuse.

'Tis a brave master;  
 Let it have scope:  
 Follow it utterly,  
 Hope beyond hope:  
 High and more high  
 It dives into noon,  
 With wing unspent,  
 Untold intent;  
 But it is a god,  
 Knows its own path  
 And the outlets of the sky.

It was never for the mean;  
 It requireth courage stout,  
 Souls above doubt,  
 Valor unbending,  
 It will reward,--  
 They shall return  
 More than they were,  
 And ever ascending.





Leave all for love;  
 Yet, hear me, yet,  
 One word more they heart behoved,  
 One pulse more of firm endeavor,--  
 Keep thee to-day,  
 To-morrow, forever,  
 Free as an Arab  
 Of thy beloved.

Cling with life to the maid;  
 But when the suprise,  
 First shadow of surmise  
 Flits across her bosom young,  
 Of a joy apart from thee,  
 Free be she, fancy-free;  
 Nor thou detain her vesture's hem,  
 Nor the palest rose she flung  
 From her summer diadem.

Though thou loved her as thyself,  
 As a self of purer clay,  
 Though her parting dims the day,  
 Stealing grace from all alive;  
 Heartily know,  
 When half-gods go,  
 The gods arrive.

The religious element was always prominent in Emerson's poetic writing; in fact, there is in some form a hint of his philosophy regarding theology in almost every one of his poems.

#### Religion in Emerson's Poetry

He is a puritan in ancestry and training,  
 yet is as unorthodox in practice and

philosophy from the point of view of adherents of puritanism as he is from that of any other organized religion. Emerson is an individualist. He doest not have to be in church to find his God, but prefers instead to seek him in the hills and forests, or the streets of the town, for the God of Emerson is everywhere. This idea of the omnipresence of the Deity is exemplified in a number of poems, chief of which, perhaps, are "Brahma", "Experience", "The Informing Spirit", "Nature", "The Rhodora", "Music",



"Pan", "Each and All", and "Threnody". The idea contained in each is perhaps best conveyed by a brief key-note quotation:

"Experience"--

The inventor of the game,  
Omnipresent without name,

"The Informing Spirit"--

There is no great and no small  
To the Soul that maketh all.

"Nature"--

Throb thine (heart) with Nature's throbbing breast,  
And all is clear from east to west.

"The Rhodora"--

The self-same lower that brought me here  
brought you.

"Music"--

Let me go where'er I will,  
I hear a sky-born music still;  
It sounds from all things old,  
It sounds from all things young,  
From all that's fair, from all that's foul,  
Peals out a cheerful song.

It is not only in the rose,  
It is not only in the bird,  
Not only where the rainbow glows,  
Nor in the song of woman heard,  
But in the darkest, meanest things,  
There alway, alway something sings.

'Tis not in the high stars along,  
Nor in the cup of budding flowers,  
Nor in the redbreast's mellow tone,  
Nor in the bow that smiles in showers,  
But in the mud and scum of things  
There alway, alway something sings.

Truly, a poet who can find the voice and presence of God

Significance in  
All Things

in such lowly surroundings is rightly  
called the poet of forward-looking, hopeful



hopeful youth; such faith is an inspiration and a challenge.

Nothing was without significance to Emerson:

"Each and All"--

All are needed by each one;  
Nothing is fair or good alone.

In the midst of his almost overwhelming grief at the loss of his beloved son, told in "Threnody," Emerson saw the light which his faith held up to him:

"Threnody"--

What is excellent,  
As God lives, is permanent;  
Hearts are dust, hearts' loves remain:  
Heart's love will meet thee again.

It seems to me that "Brahma" holds in condensed form the very essence of all that Emerson believed about the Nature-God of his deism, and further, is the most representative of all his poems which may be grouped in the class, the name of which I have given to this chapter:\*

#### BRAHMA

If the red slayer think he slays,  
Or if the slain think he is slain,  
They know not well the subtle ways  
I keep, and pass, and turn again.

Far or forgot to me is near;  
Shadow and sunlight are the same;  
The vanished gods to me appear;  
And one to me are shame and fame.

They reckon ill who leave me out;  
When me they fly, I am the wings;  
I am the doubter and the doubt.  
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.

\*For list of other poems which may be considered in the chapter "The Inner Man," see page





The strong gods pine for my abode,  
And pine in vain the sacred Seven;  
But thou, meek lover of the good!  
Find me, and turn they back on heaven.



Chapter IV

## Poems of the World

-0-

" 'Tis sufficient proof of a man's aberration to know that he is writing verses on a theory; that he has agreed with two or three critics more to bring the public over to a new taste in poetry."--(Letter to Miss Emerson, June 15, 1826.)

Poems in which the spiritual element dominates or has a large place, are chief among Emerson's writings; in fact, the ratio of poems of "The Inner Man" class to those properly classifiable under the heading "The World" is about five to one; and this percentage differentiation probably shows as great disparity as occurs in the works of any poet; yet Emerson wrote rather extensively and with great success, on subjects remotely if at all connected with the subject matter in which he was by nature and choice most deeply interested. There are subjects, he thinks,

Poetry Is Essential  
To Some Subjects

which can not be treated well in prose;  
and although "Poetry never offers a

distinct set of sensations," Emerson tells us that "it is the language of the passions which do not ordinarily find their full expression in the sober strains of prose," because, as he believes, "it seems to consist in the pleasure of finding out a connection between a material image and a moral sentiment."  
(Journal V, January 12, 1822.)

Perhaps the best examples of the carrying out of this theory of Emerson's--treating a certain subject in verse form because it does not yield itself readily to "the sober a





strains of prose"--are "May Day" and "The Adirondacks". Now, either of these long poems, so far as subject matter is concerned, contain only those commonplaces, if we regard the poems superficially, which Emerson might well have put into prose; as, for example, he did in his Journals when he took a short walking tour 'cross country for a few days; but behind the description in "May-Day" of the "Daughter of Heaven and Earth, coy Spring, with sudden passion languishing," and the "Hard fare, hard bed and comic misery" which Emerson and his companions found in their jaunt into the Adirondacks," there are note of thoughtfulness and a lyric vein, which lacking by virtue of structure in prose, would cause the reader to lose part of the effect which the writer is striving to create and establish.

Far as Emerson usually stayed from love in its sentimental or romantic form, we find occasionally a poem which might almost

Poems of Eliza-  
bethan Form

be class as Elizabethan in tone, if not in form and emotional excess; such as "The

Amulet" and "Thine Eyes Still Shined":

#### THE AMULET

Your picture smiles as first it smiled;  
The ring you gave is still the same;  
Your letter tells, O changing child!  
No tidings since it came.

Give me an amulet  
That keeps intelligence with you,--  
Red when you love, and rosier red,  
And when you love not, pale and blue.

Alas! that neither bonds nor vows  
Can certify possession:  
Torments me still the fear that love  
Died in its last expression.



## THINE EYES STILL SHINED

Thine eyes still shined for me, though far  
 I lonely roved the land or sea;  
 As I behold yon evening star,  
 Which yet beholds not me.

This morn I climbed the misty hill  
 And roamed the pastures through;  
 How danced they form before my path  
 Amidst the deep-eyed dew!

When the redbird spread his sable wing,  
 And showed his side of flame;  
 When the rosebud ripened to the rose,  
 In both I read they name.

One of the best of Emerson's poems in "The World" group is on a religious subject--"The Concord Hymn"--or rather on a politico-religious subject, dealing as it does with a monument dedication. It may seem surprising that I have chosen this as The "Occasional" Poem one of the most typical in this group, when its nature seems such as to preclude the possibility of such classification; but the poem has hardly a word of philosophical import in it; it is neither introspective nor didactic, but is merely a commemorative poem of occasional nature:

## CONCORD HYMN

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,  
 Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,  
 Hered once the embattled farmers stood,  
 And fired the shot heard round the world.

The foe long since in silence slept;  
 Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;  
 And time the ruined bridge has swept  
 Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

On this green bank, by this soft stream,  
 We set today a votive stone;  
 That memory may their deed redeem,  
 When, like our sires, our sons are gone.



Spirit, that made those heroes dare  
 To die, and leave their children free,  
 Bid Time and Nature gently spare  
 The shaft we raise to them and thee.

Of quite similar nature is the "Ode" sung in the Town Hall, Concord, July 4, 1857. If anything, it has, toward the close, still more of the religious note than is given in the last stanza of the "Concord Hymn", where there is an invocation to the Deity to spare from natural disintegration the memorial to the patriots; yet the "Ode" is fully as typical a poem of "The World" class as is the "Concord Hymn;" and the same may be said of the "Boston Hymn", commemorative of the issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation by President Lincoln, which went into effect January 1, 1863. It will be noticed that the poems described just above are occasional poems, written for a temporal usage; but that Emerson could write others as well, is clearly shown in such a delightful bit of lyric beauty as "April", which is anything but didactic, devoid of a serious thought, and is in fact nothing but a songlike spring poem of charm:

#### APRIL

The April winds are magical  
 And thrill our tuneful frames;  
 The garden walks are passionate  
 To bachelors and dames.  
 The hedge is gemmed with diamonds,  
 The air with Cupids full,  
 The cobweb clues of Rosemond  
 Guide lovers to the pool.  
 Each dimple in the water,  
 Each leaf that shades the rock  
 Can cozen, pique and flatter,  
 Can parley and provoke.  
 Goodfellow, Puck and Goblins,  
 Know more than any book.  
 Down with your doleful problems,  
 And court the sunny brook.





The south-winds are quick-witted,  
 The schools are sad and slow,  
 The masters quite omitted  
 The lore we care to know.

In marked contrast to the saucy, flippant gaiety of the pagan spring rhapsody "April" is the first stanza of the "Vol-  
"High untaries," written when the bitterness of the  
Seriousness"

Rebellion was at its height. It seems to me to be the best example of high seriousness in Emerson's verse, aside from some of the poems in "The Inner Man", which are of a different nature, and which can not well be compared justly to the powerful, dignified sadness of this stanza:

#### VOLUNTARIES

##### I.

Low and mournful be the strain,  
 Haughty thought be far from me;  
 Tones of penitence and pain,  
 Moanings of the tropic sea;  
 Low and tender in the cell  
 Where a captive sits in chains,  
 Crooning ditties treasured well  
 From his Afric's torrid plains,  
 Sole estate his sire bequeathed,--  
 Hapless sire to hapless son,--  
 Was the wailing song he breathed,  
 And his chain when life was done.

What his fault, or what his crime?  
 Or what ill planet crossed his prime?  
 Heart too soft and will too weak  
 To front the fate that crouches near,--  
 Dove beneath the vulture's beak;--  
 Will song dissuade the thirsty spear?  
 Dragged from his mother's arms and breast,  
 Displaced, disfurnished here,  
 His wistful toil to do his best  
 Chilled by a ribald jeer.  
 Great men in the Senate sate,  
 Sage and hero, side by side,  
 Building for their sons the State,  
 Which they shall rule with pride.  
 They forbore to break the chain  
 Which bound the dusky tribe,



Checked by the owner's fierce disdain,  
 Lured by "Union" as the bribe,  
 Destiny sat by, and said,  
 'Pang for pang your seed shall pay,  
 Hide in false peace your coward head,  
 I bring round the harvest day.'

Poems of "The World"--

To J. W.--Destiny--Hamatreya--The Humble-Bee--The Snow  
 Storm--Fable--Ode--To Ellen--To Eva--Thine Eyes Still  
 Shined--Kenophanes--Concord Hymn--May-Day--The Adiron-  
 dacks--Ode--Boston Hymn--Voluntaries--Boston--Solution-  
 -Hymn--The Romany Girl--My Garden--Sea-Shore--April--  
 In Memoriam--Politics--Culture--Manners--Art--The Amulet  
 --The Waterfall--Monadnoc--The South Wind--Webster--  
 Written in a Volume of Goethe--The Enchanter--

Poems of "The Inner Man"--

The Sphinx--Each and All--The Problem--To Rhea--The Visit--  
 Uriel--The World-Soul--Alphonso of Castile--Mithridates--  
 Earth-Song--Good-Bye--The Rhodora--Berrying--Woodnotes--  
 Monadnoc--Astraea--Etienne de La Boece--Compensation--  
 Forbearance--The Park--Forerunners--Sursum Corda--Ode  
 to Beauty--Give All to Love--Eros--Hermione--Initial,  
 Daemonic, and Celestial Love--The Apology--Merlin--Bacchus-  
 Merops--Saadi--Holidays--The Day's Ration--Blight--Muske-  
 taquid--Dirge--Threnody--Brahma--Fate--Freedom--Letters--  
 Rubies--The Test--Days--The Chartist's Complaint--The  
 Titmouse--The Harp--Song of Nature--Two Rivers--Walde-  
 insamkeit--Terminus--The Nun's Aspiration--Maiden Speech--  
 of the Aeolian Harp--Cupido--The Past--The Last Farewell--  
 In Experience--Compensation--Heroism--Character--Friend-  
 ship--Beauty--Spiritual Laws--Unity--Worship--Pan--The Poet-  
 Life--The Bohemian Hymn--Prayer--Grace--Eros(2)--Written  
 in Naples--Written at Rome--Peter's Field--The Walk-- May  
 Morning--The Miracle--Fame--Philosopher--Limits.





Chapter V

## Essays on the Men of Letters

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Emerson is the American essayist par-excellence. His rank the world over in the field of letters is largely dependent upon his skill in handling the essay, in which he has touched upon almost every subject. The essay constitutes by far the greater part of his published works; and a considerable portion of his journals, in which he recorded his thoughts day by day, or from time to time, to speak more correctly, consists of essays or essay-material, later developed and expanded. Upon first thought, it

The Poet-Philosopher

seems odd that a lyric poet--for lyric poet

Emerson was, even in his most philosophical poems--should be an essayist of first rank. We commonly think of essays, particularly those of the meditative or scholarly type, as coming from a man to whom poetry is well nigh a stranger; yet Emerson is a poet of renown. He succeeds in writing essays and lyric poetry both, through the force of sheer genius and intellect. Frequently a poem in his customarily short lyric-measure precedes, and sets the key-note for, an essay which is an expansion of the subject treated in the poem.

Such essays as Emerson wrote were not the work of a few idle moments, nor were they dashed off speedily, as are the somewhat similar essays of such modern writers as Dr. Frank Crane, Herbert Kaufman, Bruce Barton, or E. W. Howe. These men write for the syndicated daily press. What they write must, perforce, be done at the moment and for the moment, no matter how much



Thoughts Back  
Of the Essays

they may have turned the subject over in their minds preliminary to setting down their views on paper. Emerson "went into solitude" when he thought out material for an essay. Probably not one of the many essays he wrote was composed at one time, as the modern novel writer makes a chapter in his book. Continuity of thought is not so essential for the essay-writer as it is for the poet who writes long pieces. The familiar essay is an expression of a mood, in large measure;

Emerson's  
Essays Didactic

but a didactic essay, such as nearly all of Emerson's are, is the result of meditation: it is a gradual growth, and develops and expands in the author's mind as the oak slowly grows from the acorn, and does not spring into being mushroom-like.

Emerson was in the habit of forsaking his formal study-room, where he could never be entirely solitary because of his books, and going to Walden, or for a stroll through the woods. Undoubtedly his essays are the slowly-ripened fruit of his meditations while on his solitary rambles. As he went out into the country and viewed nature--the open air nature--Emerson meditated upon this nature and that which is manifested through man and his activities. He was practically never without his notebook; or, if pad and pencil did not accompany him to the woods and fields, then the thoughts he had while there were set down permanently as soon as he returned to his study. Emerson tells us that Wordsworth often carried even hundreds of lines of poetry in his mind before writing a stanza; and this is well and good for the poet who needs to keep in progressive order his rhymes





and lines; but the essayist of Emerson's type cannot, and need not, Gathering the work in this wise. For him it is enough to  
Fragments into record the fragment of an idea; and then,  
A Whole when the time comes for the writing of a formal essay, or the delivering or reading of an equally formal lecture, these fragments may be gathered up and made into a mosaic whole.

Many of Emerson's essays, as they now stand, were once lectures, either delivered or read. It is difficult to distinguish between most of his lectures and his essays which were written entirely as essays, such is the character of his writing. It is not often that this is the case; for usually the spoken lecture must needs be amended and amended before it is suitable for printing as an essay or brochure. An example of excellent proof of this occurs to me. Col. R. G. Ingersoll, one of the greatest of modern

The Essay  
And the Speech

lecturer-orators, spoke on subjects which are, or may be, excellent essay topics; yet if one will read the usual collection of his addresses in printed form, it is at once apparent that a great deal of effect is lost in printing them. The majority of Colonel Ingersoll's printed works were never written by him for publication, but have been assembled from stenographic and newspaper reports of his lectures as delivered. I do not know how great a use of notes Ingersoll made in delivering a lecture; but certainly he did not write out a lecture as Emerson did, so that it could be printed and lose none of its effect, without revision. An excellent example of how a reported essay of Emerson's may stand as a complete and printable





bit of writing is given by Emerson himself, although he does not comment on it, in his book on "English Traits," wherein is found his "Speech at Manchester", Emerson says: "A few days after my arrival at Manchester, in November, 1847, the Manchester Athenaeum gave its annual banquet in the Free-Trade Hall. With other guests, I was invited to be present, and to address the company. In looking over recently a newspaper report of my remarks, I incline to reprint it, as fitly expressing the feeling with which I entered England, and which agrees well enough with the more deliberate results of better acquaintance recorded in the foregoing pages. Sir Archibald Alison, the historian, presided, and opened the meeting with a speech. He was followed by Mr. Cobden, Lord Brackley, and others, among whom was Mr. Cruikshank, one of the contributors to Punch. Mr. Dickens's letter of apology for his absence was read. Mr. Jerrold, who had been announced, did not appear. On being introduced to the meeting, I said..."and there follows the account of Mr. Emerson's speech in the Free-Trade Hall.

"Reportable"  
Quality of Speeches

Certainly the man who could so arrange  
his remarks that a newspaper report of

them was satisfactory enough to him (or else he was so well reported) that he "inclines to reprint it" without change, is possessed of a wonderful power and ability in composing his thoughts! And this is but illustrative of Emerson's skill as shown at all times. An essayist who can do this well deserves the reputation he has gained.

Not only was Emerson's thought such that it suited the essay form of writing exactly, but his diction as well we find



aptly suited for this sort of composition. An essay is not to be regarded as a formal argument like that of a writer who is presenting a new theory of chemistry; nor should we think of an essay as being well written only when it shows an orderly progression from opening sentence, which should be in the style of a newspaper lead, through the body of the argument or exposition to a close which is as clearly cut as the sharp and incisive sentence with

The Essay  
A Mosaic

which such a writer as Poe concluded a narrative.

No; an essayist's subject matter, particularly if that essayist be an Emerson, we see as a grouping, more or less arbitrary, of multitudinous details. It has been said that Carlyle's individual sentences are each as sharply-cut and distinct as jewels; can we not say, then, that an essay of Emerson's is a mosaic, in which, on close inspection, we can see the component individual stones, rather than a bit of homogeneous hardened plaster-modeling?

Emerson excels in the individual sentence. He is terse, restrained, epigrammatic. Perhaps a greater number of epigrams

Emerson,  
Master of Epigram

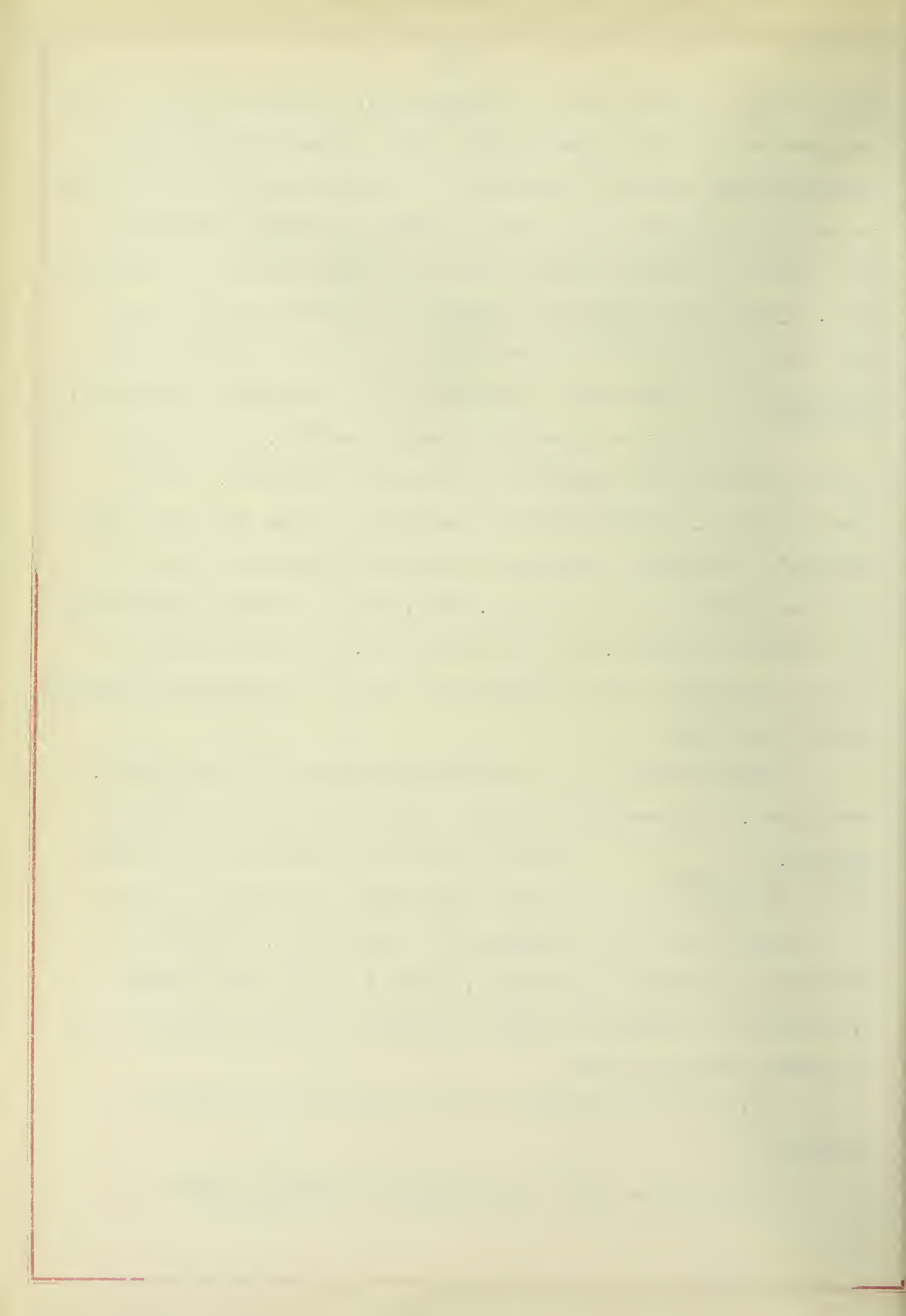
can be found in his works than in those of any other writer of essays or other

long compositions. For purposes of illustration, consider the following epigrammatic sentences, which I here quote as best illustrative of Emerson's power of saying a thing of moment in an extremely condensed form:

"All literature writes the character of the wise man."

(History)

"A man is the whole encyclopedia of facts." (History.)





"Every reform was once a private opinion, and when it shall be a private opinion again it will solve the problem of the age." (History)

"Speak your latest conviction, and it shall be the universal sense." (Self-Reliance.)

"Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind." (Self-Reliance.)

"Intellect is the simple power anterior to all action or construction. (Intellect)

"The world exists for the education of each man." (History)

"Time dissipates to shining ether the solid angularity of facts." (History)

"Nothing astonishes men so much as common-sense and plain dealing." (Art)

"The wisest doctor is gruelled by the inquisitiveness of a child." (Intellect)

"Let not your virtue be of the written or spoken sort, but of the practiced." (Journal XIV, 1824 )

"Nature is an endless combination and repetition of a very few laws." (History)

"Nature is a mutable cloud which is always and never the same." (History)\*

"The life of a man is the epitome of the life of a body of men." (Journal XVIII, Mar., 1825)

"Every man beholds his human condition with a degree of melancholy." (Intellect)

"Man is a foolish slave who is busy in forging his own fetters." (Journal XII, June, 1823)



"Sympathy is the wine of life." (Journal XIII, Jan. 25, 1824)

"What is our life but an endless flight of winged facts or events?" (History)

"In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts." (Self-Reliance)

"What is a man but nature's finer success in self-explication?" (Art)

"Every law which the state enacts indicates a fact in human nature; that is all." (History)

"A mind might ponder its thoughts for ages and not gain so much self-knowledge as the passion of love shall teach it in a day." (History)

"A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines." (Self-Reliance.)  
(Sel

"Our spontaneous action is always the best." (Intellect)

"There is time enough for every business men are really resolved to do." (Journal XIV. 1824)

"The difference between men is in their principle of association." (History)

"To be great is to be misunderstood." (Self-Reliance)

"The bodies of intemperate men are the tombs of immortal minds."

"Truth is handsomer than the affectation of love."  
(Self-Reliance)

"What is the use of pretending to know what we know not?"  
(History)

"To believe too much is dangerous, because it is the



near neighbour of unbelief. Pantheism leads to Atheism."  
(Journal XVIII, Mar. 11, 1827)

What Emerson said in few words, in single sentences like the above--and these are but hastily chosen examples from a huge source--other writers use, and have used, paragraphs or chapters to express. One can study Emerson's individual sentences as a jeweler would study the individual pearls on a strand of beads, such is the way in which they stand distinct, and yet linked into a whole.

In general, it may be said that a rough division of Emerson's essays may be made so that all the subjects he covered may be classified as Special or as General. He dealt with the

Rough Grouping  
Of Essays

qualities of Man in the large, and he dealt with the qualities of the named man. He

touched upon a history that is universal, and upon the sagas of the Northmen. His facile pen wrote with equal wisdom and excellence of poetry as a symbol, and of Shakespeare, the immortal bard. I have found it more practical, however, in discussing Emerson's essays, to forsake such an obvious grouping as that which I have mentioned above, and instead have arranged in what seems to me a proper sequence, regardless of chronological continuity, or type, from the standpoint of special or general subject-matter, the essays considered, feeling that the grouping in the following pages is of far greater advantage in leading to an understanding of the subjects Emerson treated, and the manner in which he handled them.

During an oration delivered before the literary societies





of Dartmouth college, July 24, 1838, Emerson said that he felt that one of the things of greatest benefit to him in his undergraduate days was his belief in the place of the scholar in the world: "I have reached the middle age of man," he said, "yet I believe I am not less glad or sanguine at the meeting of scholars, than when, a boy, I first saw the graduates of my own College assembled at their anniversary. Neither years nor books have yet

The Place of  
The Scholar

availed to extirpate a prejudice then rooted in me, that a scholar is the favourite of heaven and earth, the excellency of his country, the happiest of men. His duties lead him directly into the holy ground where other men's aspirations only point. His successes are occasions of the purest joy to all men. Eyes is he to the blind; feet is he to the lame. His failures, if he is worthy, are inlets to higher advantages. And because the scholar, by every thought he thinks, extends his dominion into the general mind of men, he is not one, but many. The few scholars in each country, whose genius I know, seem to me not individuals, but societies; and, when events occur of great import, I count over these representatives of opinion, whom they will affect, as if I were counting nations. And, even if his results were incommunicable; if they abode in his own spirit; the intellect hath somewhat so sacred in its possessions, that the fact of his existence and pursuits would be a happy omen."

Thus Emerson; and he points out that the one who holds the

Intellect, the  
Divine Force

sceptre is limited in his monarchy of nature and men by the intellect which is his divine



force. He says: "The resources of the scholar are proportioned to his confidence in the attributes of the Intellect. The resources of the scholar are co-extensive with nature and truth, yet can never be his, unless claimed by him with an equal greatness of mind. He cannot know them until he has beheld with awe the infinitude and impersonality of the intellectual power. When he has seen, that it is not his, nor any man's, but that it is the soul which made the world, and that it is all accessible to him, he will know that he, as its minister, may rightfully hold all things subordinate and answerable to it."

If the scholar, the literary man, such as Emerson wrote of, and such as will be considered in this chapter, is to go on "Spiritual Independence" and exercise and exhibit his power, Emerson would have us know, he must not be bound by conventionality, must not be a slave to precept or forever in fear of going where there is no guiding precedent: "The sense of spiritual independence is like the lovely varnish of the dew, whereby the old, hard, peaked earth, and its old self-same productions, are made new every morning, and shining with the last touch of the artist's hand."

These, then, were the qualities the scholar must have; and Emerson wrote a series of essays on men representative, each in his field, of all the attributes mentioned. Your scholar is not necessarily a poet, not necessarily an historian; but he must be the highest in his field.

#### REPRESENTATIVE MEN

"It is natural," Emerson reminds us, "to believe in great





men. If the companions of our childhood should turn out to be heroes, and their conditions regal, it would not surprise us. All mythology opens with demigods, and the circumstance is high and poetic; that is, their genesis is paramount. In the legends of the Gautama, the first man ate the earth, and found it deliciously sweet."

There is in all of us a tendency to pursue the great men; to see him, if we can; or, if he be dead, or unavailable, then to see what he has done--what mark of his presence there is left on art, things, men, nations. "We travel into foreign parts to find his works," Emerson says; and, in speaking of the influence of great men, adds: "The race goes with us on their credit. The

"Study                      knowledge that in the city is a man who in-  
Great Men"                vented the railroad, raises the credit of all

the citizens." Each of us can put to use the great men of history. Studying them and what they have done helps us to understand ourselves--aids in our conduct of life. If we would have the most benefit from great men, we should not go to see, or converse with, those whose great qualities are but magnifications of our own lesser characteristics: your poet should know the greatest man in natural science, and your lawmaker should visit the poet in his home. "Each man seeks those of different quality from his own, and such as are good of their kind; that is, he seeks other men, and the otherest," Emerson says. It seems that he did not fully live up to this standard when he visited Coleridge, Wordsworth, Landor; but he was a younger man than they, and modest enough not to account himself as a great poet or



writer of any sort, so that visiting other great poets would be a waste of time. At all events, these greater poets (greater at the time, at least) had a salutary effect: "The stronger the nature the more it is reactive. Let us have the quality pure. A little genius let us leave along."

Of the benefits, or gifts, obtainable from great men, there are two kinds--the direct and the indirect. Emerson says that "Direct giving is agreeable to the early belief of men; direct "Education is Man's Unfolding" giving of material or metaphysical aid, as of health, eternal youth, fine senses, arts of healing, magical power, and prophecy. The boy believes there is a teacher who can sell him wisdom. Churches believe in imputed merit. But, in strictness, we are not much cognisant of direct serving. Man is endogenous, and education is his unfolding. Gift is contrary to the law of the universe. Indirect service is left. Men have a pictorial or representative quality, and serve us in the intellect."

Having these things in mind, then, let us consider the men of different types included under the general heading of "Representative Men," and also a few others concerning whom Emerson has written essays, and which I have chosen to briefly discuss here, feeling that their proper place is in this connection. What are the kinds of men Emerson likes? Hear him: "I admire great men of all classes, those who stand for facts, and for thoughts; I like rough and smooth, 'Sourges of God,' and 'Darlings of the human race.' I like the first Caesar: and Charles V., of Spain; and Charles XII., of Sweden; Richard Plantagenet; and Bonaparte,





"Masters of  
Men"

in France. I applaud a sufficient man, an officer equal to his office: captains, ministers, senators. I like a master standing firm on legs of iron, well-born, handsome, rich, eloquent, loaded with advantages, drawing all men by fascination into tributaries and supporters of his power. Sword and staff, or talents sword-like and staff-like, carry on the work of the world. But I find him greater, when he can abolish himself, and all heroes, by letting in this element of reason, irrespective of persons; this subtiliser, and irresistible upward force, into our thought, destroying individualism; the power so great, that the potentate is nothing. Then he is a monarch, who gives a constitution to his people; a pontiff, who preaches the equality of souls, and releases his servants from their barbarous homages; an emperor, who can spare his empire."

No one could give a higher compliment to Plato than Emerson, when he said "Among books, Plato only is entitled to Omar's  
Plato's fanatical compliment to the Koran, when he said,  
Place

'Burn the libraries, for their value is in this book.' These sentences contain the culture of nations; these are the corner-stone of schools; these are the fountain-head of literatures. A discipline it is in logic, arithmetic, taste, symmetry, poetry, language, rhetoric, ontology, morals, or practical wisdom. There was never such range of speculation. Out of Plato come all things that are still written and debated among men of thought." Emerson tells us that Plato absorbed the learning of his own time, and points the way to the learning of today. His philosophical concepts are of value in all things in understanding the conduct





of life. "Philosophy is the account which the human mind gives to itself of the constitution of the world," Emerson says: and goes on to show how all this is included in Plato, whom he has chosen as one of his "Representative Men," styling him the typical or representative philosopher, wherein "the quality is pure." Of value to the human in learning the meaning of life is to be logical;

"The Great  
Average Man"

and who could do better than to study Plato, who,

Emerson says, was as definite and absolute in his logic as the mathematician in reading his logarithmic tables. Perhaps Emerson finds the greatest value in Plato when he says that "He is a great average man; one who, to the best thinking, adds a proportion and equality in his faculties, so that men see in him their own dreams and glimpses made available, and made to pass for what they are."

As Plato was the representative philosopher, so, in Emerson's day, was Swedenborg the representative mystic. Undoubtedly such a mind as Emerson's, imbued with idealism, transcendentalism, would perforce be attracted to such thought as the expressed in Swedenborgianism; and so we find him saying of Emanuel Swedenborg: "A colossal soul, he lies vast abroad on his times, uncomprehended by them, and requires a long focal distance to be seen; suggests, as Aristotle, Bacon, Selden, Humboldt, that a certain

Swedenborg and  
Mysticism

vastness of learning, or quasi omnipresence of the human soul in nature, is possible."

Emerson tells us of the youthful training of the man who was some day to make a great and lasting mark in religion, and points out that for many years this later mystic was engaged in scientific



studies and works of the most concrete and naturalistic nature. What was the true note of all of Swedenborg's knowledge and practices? Hear Emerson: "The thoughts in which he lived were, the universality of each law in nature; the Platonic doctrine of the scale or degrees; the version or conversion of each into other, and so the correspondence of all the parts; the fine secret that little explains large, and large, little: the centrality of man in nature, and the connection that subsists throughout all things: he saw that the human body was strictly universal, or an instrument through which the soul feeds and is fed by the whole of matter; so that he held, in exact antagonism to the sceptics, that, 'the wiser a man is, the more will he be a worshipper of the Deity.'" But Swedenborg, Emerson hastens to point out, was "See God in Nature" not always interested in the miraculous aspects of God's omnipresence; this mystic felt that it was as great a call to man to see God in nature as in miracles. Nature and not super-nature was his idea. Emerson says that "To a right perception, at once broad and minute, of the order of nature, he added the comprehension of the moral laws in their widest social aspects; but whatever he saw, through some excessive determination to form, in his constitution, he saw not abstractly, but in pictures, heard it in dialogues, constructed it in events. When he attempted to announce the law most sanely, he was forced to couch it in parable." The benefit we derive, then, in using this great and representative man, is obtained from his humanity and his action in relating things;--without which knowledge or belief is useless.





Turning from a man who was representative of all that was implied in faith, Swedenborg, Emerson takes up Montaigne, whom he

What Is a  
True Sceptic?

styles "The Sceptic." What is a true sceptic?

And what is his use? Emerson gives his opin-

ion thus: "This, then, is the right ground of the sceptic,--this of consideration, of self-containing; not at all of unbelief; not at all of universal denying, nor of universal doubting--doubting even that he doubts; least of all, of scoffing and profligate jeering at all that is stable and good." At some time or other in our lives, we are sure to be sceptics, Emerson feels; and he indicates it as follows: "But though we are natural conservers and causationists, and reject a sour, dumpish unbelief, the sceptical class, which Montaigne represents, have reason, and every man, at some time, belongs to it. Every superior mind will pass through this domain of equilibration--I should rather say, will know how to avail himself of the checks and balances in nature, as a natural weapon against the exaggeration and formalism of bigots and blockheads." We see here the value of the sceptic and of some of the sceptical attitude to us: It enables us to avoid the danger of being led by absolutely blind faith, without use of that intellect which is God-given and should guide us.

No one, probably, will dispute Emerson's choice of Shakespeare as the representative poet. True, Homer is often so-called; but Homer is not only of an entirely different class, but also his work more nearly resembles a written collection of the Norse sagas and folk-tales than it does pure poetry, as Shakespeare's



is. Emerson did not like many things Shakespeare said. He felt that some of the freedom of the greatest of the poets, running into a grossness that was unknown in the Elizabethan era, might

Shakespeare's  
Claim to Glory

with value have been omitted: yet he real-

ized that Shakespeare's claim to glory is

based on nothing but truth; and the reason for his almost illimitable success is his humanity: "Other men say wise things as well as he; only they say a good many foolish things, and do not know when they have spoken wisely. He knows the sparkle of the true stone, and puts it in high place, wherever he finds it. He borrows very near home." This is what we might expect of the English poet, as we have seen heretofore, where Emerson describes the British bard as picking out for his subjects the familiar, homely objects. That the world was tardy in recognizing the Olympian grandeur of Shakespeare was certain to be the case:

"Our poet's mask was impenetrable. You cannot see the mountain near. It took a century to make it suspected; and not until two centuries had passed, after his death, did any criticism which we think adequate begin to appear." Emerson felt that those critics who judge Shakespeare as dramatist only, fail to give him his due; and Emerson's whole concept of Shakespeare is contained

Eulogy of  
Shakespeare

in these lines: "He wrote the airs for all our modern music; he wrote the text of modern life;

the text of manners: he drew the man of England and Europe; the father of the man in America: he drew the man, and described the day, and what is done in it: he read the hearts of men and women, their probity, and their second thought, and wiles; the wiles of





innocence, and the transitions by which virtues and vices slide into their contraries; he could divide the mother's part from the father's part in the face of the child, or draw the fine demarcations of freedom and of fate: he knew the laws of repression which make the police of nature: and all the sweets and all the terrors of human lot lay in his mind as truly but as softly as the landscape lies on the eye, And the importance of this wisdom of life sinks the form, as of Drama or Epic, out of notice. 'Tis like making a question concerning the paper on which a king's message is written."

Although Napoleon, whom Emerson selects as the representative "man of the World" "is no hero, in the high sense," and "no One's Own History in Napoleon capuchin", to use his own words for denying any claim to saintliness, Emerson tells us at once that "Every one of the million readers of anecdotes or memoirs, or lives of Napoleon, delights in the page, because he studies in it his own history." We are all prone, when reading of the deeds of some character noted in history, to say to ourselves, Why, this man thinks the same things I do!" And it is not at all difficult to understand that "Bonaparte was the idol of common men, because he had in transcendent degree the qualities and powers of common men." Napoleon, Emerson tells us, was "actually a monopoliser and usurper of other minds." All the great achievements of Napoleon were accomplished because he cared for nothing but success. He was not to be stopped by anything: "Napoleon renounced, once for all, sentiments and affections, and would help himself with his hands and his head. With





him is no miracle, and no magic. He is a worker in brass, in iron, in wood, in earth, in roads, in buildings, in money, and in troops, and a very consistent and wise master-workman." Emerson speaks of Napoleon as being the "pattern democrat" to which is due the fact that he is the idol and ideal of the average man.

"Goethe; or, the Writer," is a chapter in "Representative Men" wherein Emerson tells us that he finds "Goethe, the Secretary" a provision, in the constitution of the world, for the writer or secretary, who is to report the doings of the miraculous spirit of life that everywhere throbs and works. His office is a reception of the facts into the mind, and then a selection of the eminent and characteristic experiences." He tells us, further, that "society has really no graver interest than the well-being of the literary class. And it is not to be denied that men are cordial in their recognition and welcome of intellectual accomplishments." As he chose Napoleon as the representative "man of the world", then Goethe is chosen by Emerson as the representative of the other half of the "popular external life and aims of the nineteenth century."

A Literary Genius He tells us that among the lists of literary geniuses of the age there is no name greater than that of Goethe, to "represent the powers and duties of the scholar or writer." Such a high estimate as this of the great German poet-writer is upheld further, where Emerson says that "The 'Helena' or the second part of 'Faust' is a philosophy of literature set in poetry."

Very probably, Emerson's walks to Walden often made him the more or less chance meeter of Thoreau, that almost inaccessible



recluse whose delight in nature, if for a somewhat different reason, was as great as Emerson's. Their different appreciation

Emerson and  
Thoreau

of nature, it might be said, is one of kind,  
and not of extent, because the naturalist

Thoreau, claiming that he could tell what day it was if suddenly awakened in the woods from a trance, by studying the plants about him, is as thoroughly an exemplar of the belief in the Idea, that permeates and yet antedates all material manifestations of the visible world, as is Emerson, whose Nature is more abstract.

In his terse, epigrammatic manner, Emerson describes for us this strangely unmodern man, Thoreau. We gain as accurate a picture of the inner man from the essay on Thoreau as a photograph would give us of the fleshly man. Emerson tells us, in a passage describing the spirit of Thoreau, that "There was somewhat military in his nature, not to be subdued, always manly and able, but rarely tender, as if he did not feel himself except in opposition. He wanted a fallacy to expose, a blunder to pillory, I may say required a little sense of victory, a roll of the drum, to call his powers into full exercise. It cost him nothing to say No; indeed, he found it much easier than to say Yes."

It is, perhaps, a far cry from the New England idealist-individualist to the writer of 'Paradise Lost'; yet Emerson understood, interpreted, and valued the blind poet of Cromwell's secretariat. The two were certainly far apart in the ways in which they expressed their faith in the Ruling Force of the universe, yet Emerson is delighted to mark the fact that Milton's fame is changing and growing, and "is not rigid and stony like





Milton's Fame  
To Grow

his bust." He points out that "as a man's fame, of course, characterises those who give it, as much as him who receives it, the new criticism indicated a change in the public taste, and a change which the poet himself might claim to have wrought." What is it in Milton, newly discovered, which is making him greater than ever? Emerson tells us that "he kindles a love and emulation in us which he did not in foregoing generations;" and he believes that now Milton's fame is sure to grow and to be secure.

Hardly a pleasing characterisation of Walter Savage Landor is given us in the following passage; "In Mr. Landor's coarseness there is a certain air of defiance, and the rude word seems sometimes to arise from a disgust at niceness and over-refinement. Before a well-dressed company he plunges his fingers in a cess-pool, as if to expose the whiteness of his hands and the jewels of his ring. Afterward, he washes them in wine: but you are never secure from his freaks." We are but little reassured, however, when Emerson goes on to say that Landor is "A sort of Earl Peter-

Landor's Blunt  
Assertiveness

borough in literature, his eccentricity is too decided not to have diminished his greatness. He has capital enough to have furnished the brain of fifty stock authors, yet has written no good book." Emerson seems to value Landor's blunt assertiveness which reaches almost to a disregard for others' opinions which is unsocial and uncivil, for he says: "What he says of Wordsworth is true of himself, that he delights to throw a clod of dirt on the table and cry "Gentlemen, there is a better man than all of you." However, a better picture



of the man is given us in this passage, and we come to see his finer points: "But we have spoken all our discontent. Possibly his writings are open to harsher censure; but we love the man, from sympathy as well as for reasons to be assigned; and have no wish, if we were able, to put an argument in the mouth of his critics, Now for twenty years we have still found the Imaginary

"The Rich and  
Ample Page

Conversations a sure resource in solitude,

and it seems to us as original in its form

as in its matter. Nay, when we remember his rich and ample page, wherein we are always sure to find free and sustained thought, a keen and precise understanding, an affluent and ready memory familiar with all chosen books, an industrious observation in every department of life, an experience to which nothing has occurred in vain, honour for every just and generous sentiment and a scourge like that of Furies for every oppressor, whether public or private, we feel how dignified is this perpetual Censor in his curule chair, and we wish to thank a benefactor of the reading world."

To discuss Michael Angelo, the sculptor who felt that a knowledge of anatomy is essential for him who carves in marble, in order that he may depict the more faithfully the intricacies of detail of the surface, is a fit task for a man who went into

The Statue and  
The Essay

solitude to study the anatomy of nature,

in order that he might later chisel out his

detailed sentences setting forth every lineament of the whole; and so Emerson we find to be an apt hand at portraying the spirit and work of the great Italian artist. It is needless, perhaps,



to go into detail in picking out the points in the description and exposition of Emerson in dealing with this subject; suffice it to quote the following: "Above all men whose history we know, Michael Angelo presents us with the perfect image of the artist, He is an eminent master in the four fine arts, Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, and Poetry."





Chapter VI

## Essays, Political and Social

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Emerson, in his essays, did not deal alone with literary and other men whom he considered representative; he turns with facility from the discussion of the specific to interpretation of the general; and the essays considered in the following chapter take up a vast variety of phases of human conduct, viewed from many angles. Throughout, we find the interpretation colored with Emerson's strong personality, in spite of the fact that it is sometimes said that he stripped his essays of personality. This, it would seem, is not wholly true; and it would be regrettable, perhaps, if it were. No man can write or speak of the great truths of life impartially. To attempt to do so would be to deprive a field pregnant with possibilities of the warmth of an interpretation as richly human as Emerson's.

"To a sound judgment," he says, "the most abstract truth is the most practical;" and we find throughout his writings evidences of his belief in this statement, which here appears in its most axiomatic form. He who searches ever more for the practical, in man or the larger Nature, this transcendentalist would have us understand, is likely to lose sight of the fact which to him was self-evident: that the Idea is all, for it is the ultimate thing, philosophically considered. Not that is ultimate Nature and The Soul which is arrived at last, as the conclusion in an argument; but that which is ultimate is the



primary causation, that point back of which we can not attain. Emerson says that "Philosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul. Strictly speaking, therefore, all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name, NATURE. In enumerating the values of nature and casting up their sum. I shall use the word in both senses--in its common and in its philosophical import. In inquiries so general as our present one, the inaccuracy is not material; no confusion of thought will occur. Nature, in the common sense, refers to essences unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaf. Art is applied to the mixture of his will with the same things, as in a house, a canal, a statue, a picture. But his operations taken together are so insignificant, a little chipping, baking, patching, and washing, that in an impression so grand as that of the world on the human mind, they do not vary the result."

How is a man to regard nature, if he would understand it best? Whether one consider nature in common or the philosophical sense, it is essential that nature be considered in such a way that the highest understanding of facts and processes is attained. A man can not do his best thinking in a crowd, or where his attention is likely to be drawn by those around him; he must go into solitude to study nature in either of the two larger senses--and solitude is not always found in his study, however much this retreat may be left unvisited by other men, because in his study there are books to

How Understand  
Nature?





read, there is the temptation to study, to write--"But if a man could be alone, let him look at the stars." It was in pursuance of that idea that Emerson so frequently left the study in his home, and went strolling through the woods; or, at Walden, one of his favorite retreats, sat him down to think.

In his essay on Nature, Emerson points out that all of the wide world is ours to enjoy: "Miller owns this field, Locke that, The Poet and Nature and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape. There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet. This is the best part of these men's farms, yet to this their warranty deeds give no title."

It would seem that Emerson is at one with Wordsworth when he says: "To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature." Truly, the Rydal Mount sage and mystic goes no farther in his "Ode on Intimations of Immortality" than Emerson, when he says: "The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood," and further, this: "The Go into the Woods sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child." If one would enjoy and understand nature to the utmost, he must have this childlike power; and Emerson says that all of us can wield it, if we go into the woods; "In the woods, too, a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what period soever of life, is always a child."

In discussing Nature as Commodity, Emerson points out that



Nature is more than the food or drink of life; "not only the material, but is also the process and the result. All the parts incessantly work into each other's hands for the profit of man." And Emerson's faith and belief in the fact that God is manifest everywhere throughout the universe is brought to us in the passage: "the endless circulations of the divine charity nourish man." But if we admit this, that Nature subserves man's desires and

Higher Function  
Of Nature

needs, should we think that for this, and this only, Nature exists? Is there no

higher function in this activity and function than to be a source of life? Hear Emerson: "A man is fed, not that he may be fed, but that he may work." It is not enough that we receive Nature's gifts, even those of the higher nature than the material. We must also take the things which the divine source, the Idea manifest, gives to us, and put them to use. The man who receives and never gives is half a man or less. Fulfilment of destiny is best seen in activity.

The soul is in search of, and delighted when it finds, beauty--another of the characteristics of Nature. As Emerson says in one of his poems that there is a beauty "even in the mud and scum of things," so here we find the statement that "Even the corpse has its own beauty."

Just why is it that each of us is ever in search of Beauty?

The Search  
for Beauty

Is there a real function, a practical purpose, in Beauty? There are times when the

physical manifestation of Beauty is of value; the mean soul is elevated by looking at a noble work of art: "The simple perception





of natural forms is a delight." But if this were all, it were not enough. We see and appreciate Beauty because Beauty is natural. It is found in all natural objects, low or high. A work of art, being the embodiment of the Idea, is a summation of the world of nature: "A work of art is an abstract or epitome of the world," Emerson tells us; and since all of us are of the world, and cognizant of its processes, there is answer enough in this for the existence of Beauty, and reason enough why it is sought. Emerson says that "No reason can be asked or given why the soul seeks beauty. Beauty, in its largest and profoundest sense, is one expression of the universe. God is the all-fair."

Nature, besides serving the human being in the guise of commodity and that of beauty, subserves also in language. Words, Words and The Mind that is to say, establish the necessary connection between mind and matter. Without the word, written or printed, man is no better than other animals. He has no way of telling his neighbor of the facts of life as he sees them. Above all, Emerson frequently insists, is the Idea; if we have words to express ourselves, we can relate that Idea to life, to the manifestations of the Idea in man, art, nature. Before we can understand spirit, it is best if we can see a concretion of it. This is true for us throughout life. Numbers are always abstract, philosophically viewed; and the child, beginning his education, is not taught the number one, but sees its meaning in "one apple", "one boy", etc. We are forever seeking to put down in a form that the senses can evaluate, some expression of the idea. It seems that it is essential to our welfare that we do





this. "There seems to be a necessity in spirit to manifest itself in material forms; and day and night, river and storm, beast and bird, acid and alkali, pre-exist in necessary Ideas in the mind of God, and are what they are by virtue of proceeding affections, in the world of spirit. A Fact is the end or last issue of spirit."

We learn from nature through the discipline that is implied in all of the uses nature makes of herself for us. "Our dealing  
Discipline                      with sensible objects," Emerson reminds us, "is  
Of Nature                      a constant exercise in the necessary lessons of difference, of likeness, of order, of being and seeming, of progressive arrangement; of ascent from particular to general; of combination to one end of manifold forces." That is to say, we learn by experience. "The burnt child shuns the fire" is trite, but true; and what man learns through experience, what discipline he receives at the hands of a nature whose "dice are always loaded," should, if he have the right outlook upon life, guide him in his conduct of life.

Perhaps the discipline of nature should give us a hint of the idealism which is behind it all. The point of view of the transcendentalist is contained in Emerson's statement that "A noble doubt perpetually suggests itself, whether this end be not the  
"Final                      Final Cause of the universe; and whether nature  
Cause"                      outwardly exists." And further: "Whether nature enjoy a substantial existence without, or is only in the apocalypse of the mind, it is alike useful and alike venerable to me." When one reads such statements, one is prone to wonder whether or not the Christian Science doctrines of today are not the final growth



of the idealistic philosophy, which went from Plato through Plotinus and the other Neo-Platonists, on up through the German philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and crystallized into New England Transcendentalism. The similarity is surprising. At all events, Emerson says that "Finally, religion and ethics, which may be fitly called,--the practice of ideas, or the introduction of ideas into life,--have an analogous effect with all lower culture, in degrading nature and suggesting its dependence on spirit." Back of and behind all the physical manifestations of the Idea, Emerson means, is the Idea itself; and idealism is a natural property of the man who is but one of the phases of this manifestation. Continuing this view of the

Man, Nature,                      the subject, in the division of the essay on  
God                                      Nature headed "Spirit", Emerson says that "As a plant upon the earth, so a man rests upon the bosom of God; he is nourished by unfailing fountains, and draws, at his need, inexhaustible power." All that is necessary for man to do, is to learn how to tap that reservoir of Ideas, of which everything in nature and art is a product, if man would hold the secret of life. To those who are able to do this, Emerson says in "Prospects", the last subdivision of his subject, "a fact is true poetry, and the most beautiful of fables."

In giving us the uses for which Nature is designed, there are methods employed, the understanding of which is requisite to man. The fountain-head of all is God, the source of the inexhaustible Idea. It is not for us to question too closely, how-

"All Things  
Are God's"

ever: "It is God in us which checks the





language of petition by a grander thought. In the bottom of the heart, it is said; "I am, and by me, O child! this fair body and world of thine stands and grows. I am; all things are mine; and all mine are thine." If we but realize this, then our conduct of life will be right and proper and satisfactory. Nature has no limited purpose: "Nature can only be conceived as existing to a universal and not to a particular end," Emerson reminds us. Emerson's idea that "the dice of God are always loaded" is brought out again in "The Method of Nature" where he says: "I conceive a man as always spoken to from behind, and unable to turn his head and see the speaker". How, then, can man conquer nature and make it, in its devious methods, subserve his purpose? The answer, Emerson feels, is plain: "By piety alone, and by conversing with the cause of nature, is he safe and commands it."

Emerson, in his long essay on Nature, and in that on The Method of Nature, both of which have been considered above, deals with the varied manifestations of nature; in Essay VI, Second All Nature Is Useful Series, he describes external nature for its beauties and services to us; and he says; "It seems as if the day was not wholly profane, in which we have given heed to some natural object. The fall of snowflakes in a still air, preserving to each crystal its perfect form; the blowing of sleet over a wide sheet of water, and over plains, the waving ryefield, the mimic waving of acres of houstonia, whose innumerable florets whiten and ripple before the eye; the reflections of trees and flowers in glassy lakes; the musical steaming odorous south wind, which converts all trees to wind-harps; the



crackling and spurting of hemlock in the flames; or of pine logs, which yield glory to the walls and faces in the sitting-room,-- these are the music and pictures of the most ancient religion." If the artist cannot call to our minds pictures like these, then he fails. The unnatural is never beautiful; and by avoiding nature, is of no use to us. That which serves us best is that which is most like nature; "Only as far as the masters of the world have called in nature to their aid," Emerson says, "can they reach the height of magnificence."

After all, it is only in so far as our understanding of nature aids us in our conduct of life that what we have seen, observed, thought upon, learned, is of value; and Emerson points this out repeatedly in his essay on "The Conduct of Life". If

Use Your Knowledge            a man have everything, and know not how to use it, of what avail is his possession? Understanding is the chief business of all of us; understanding our businesses, understanding our friends, understanding ourselves. "It chanced during one winter, a few years ago", Emerson remarks, "That our critics were bent on discussing the theory of the Age. By an odd coincidence, four or five noted men were each reading a discourse to the citizens of Boston or New York, on the Spirit of the Times. It so happened that the subject had the same prominence in some remarkable pamphlets and journals issued in London in the same season. To me, however, the question of the times resolved itself into a practical question of the conduct of life. "How shall I live?" Veritably, the query, "How shall I live?" is one which each of us must put to himself. All we do;





the books we read, the thoughts we evolve, the friends we make--all are of use to us only in so far as they enable us to answer that question satisfactorily. I have chosen, and quoted below, different phases of Emerson's answer to that query:

"Life is a search after power; and this is an element with which the world is so saturated,--there is no chink or crevice

Power, the  
Secret of Life

in which it is not lodged,--that no honest seeking goes unrewarded. A man should

prize events and possessions as the one in which this fine mineral is found; and he can well afford to let events and possessions and the breath of the body go, if their value has been added to him in the shape of power." In this, we see Emerson's idea that work, with its accompanying reward in money, position, influence, is one of the things we must consider, if we are to understand what the proper conduct of our life is to be.

This idea is further developed in the chapter on "Wealth," wherein Emerson says: "As soon as a stranger is introduced into any company, one of the first questions which all wish to have answered is, How does that man get his living? And with reason. He is no whole man until he knows how to earn a blameless livelihood. Society is barbarous until every industrious man can

"Be a  
Producer

get his living without dishonest customs. Every man is a consumer, and ought to be a producer.

He fails to make his place good in the world unless he not only pays his debt, but also adds something to the common wealth."

The latter part of this quotation is socialistic, and reflects the communism with which Emerson and others were imbued when





the Transcendentalists tried the Brook Farm experiment. Brook Farm failed; but any thinking man will acknowledge that his only chance of real success--a success that goes farther than the superficial one of owning property--lies in sticking by this principle steadfastly. Production, then, should be one of our guides in determining our conduct of life.

But it will avail us little, if we work, produce, and add to the store of the material wealth of the world as well as our own, if we have no cultural power too. True wealth consists not in owning a fine horse, but in knowing how to drive him. The man with thousands of beautiful acres is poor, if he can not walk over them in spring and delight in the budding of renascent life.

Culture is  
Necessary

Emerson tells us that "The word of ambition at the present day is Culture. Whilst all the world is in pursuit of power, and of wealth as a means of power, culture corrects the theory of success. A man is the prisoner of his power. A topical memory makes him an almanac; a talent for debate, a disputant; skill to get money makes him a miser, that is, a beggar. Culture reduces these inflammations by invoking the aid of other powers against the dominant talent, and by appealing to the rank of powers. It watches success. For performance, Nature has no mercy, and sacrifices the performer to get it done; makes a dropsy or a tympany of him. If she wants a thumb, she makes one at the cost of arms and legs, and any excess of power in one part is usually paid for at once by some defect in a contiguous part." Balance, then, is an essential in our conduct of life as is work. The old Greek motto of



"moderation in all things" might with justice be applied here.

What Is a  
Proper Man?

The genius--that is, the "freakish" genius--

is not a proper man. A symmetrical culture

is best. It is difficult to attain this, Emerson recognizes full well; and he says that "Our efficiency depends so much on our concentration, that Nature usually in the instances where a marked man is sent into the world, overloads him with bias, sacrificing his symmetry to his working powers." What is culture? might be asked; if it is to be understood that culture should be our guide, how can we attain it? How avoid being overloaded with a bias? Emerson says: "Culture is the suggestion from certain best thoughts, that a man has a range of affinities, through which he can modulate the violence of any master-tones that have a droning preponderance in his scale, and succour him against himself. Culture redresses his balance, puts him among his equals and superiors, revives the delicious sense of sympathy, and warns him of the dangers of solitude and repulsion".

Emerson quotes Plato as saying that "A boy is the most vicious of all wild beasts," and Gascoigne as saying that "A boy is better unborn than untaught." Education, then, must be brought into play, if we are to be cultured men; but is ed-

True  
Education

ucation doing its part? Education, if it is

to be the source, or one of the main tribut-

aries, to culture, must be the right sort. Emerson says "Let us make our education brave and preventive," and goes on to comment that though the parent sends the boy to school to learn





grammar and study through long terms, the boy is pleased best not be associating with his instructors, or in perusing Greek syntaxes, but in looking into shop windows on his way home from school, and in mingling with those of his own age. "He hates the grammar and Gradus," Emerson says, "and loves guns, fishing rods, horses, and boats. Well, the boy is right; and you are not fit to direct his bringing up if your theory leaves out his gymnastic training. Archery, cricket, gun and fishing-rod, horse and boat, are all educators, liberalisers; and so are dancing, dress, and the stree-talk; and,--provided only the boy has resources, and is of a noble and ingenuous strain,--these will not serve him less than the books, He learns chess, whist, dancing, and theatricals. The father observes that another boy Liberal Judgment Through Education has learned algebra and geometry in the same time. But the first boy has acquired much more than these poor games along with them..... These minor skills and accomplishments,--for example, dancing, --are tickets of admission to the dress-circle of mankind, and the being master of them enables the youth to judge intelligently of much on which, otherwise, he would give a pedantic squint." Liberalisation, then, is also a requisite to the man who would know what his conduct of life should be. The pure scholiast, the pedant, the book-worm, the man who lives in mind only, is not symmetrically cultured. A cultured man, perhaps, should know Greek and the classics; but he is not cultured if he knows them perfectly, and can not box, ride, or row.

"We talk much of utilities,--but 'tis our manners that



associate us", Emerson says. Behaviour is one of things in our conduct of life which we must watch. "The soul which animates nature is not less significantly published in the figure, movement, and gesture of animated bodies, than in its last vehicle of articulate speech. This silent and subtile language is Manners; not what, but how." Thus Emerson in the fifth subdivision of his essay on "The Conduct of Life;" and the idea is greatly expanded in his essay on "Manners", discussion of which I include here for purposes of illustration,

The What and because I feel that its proper relation  
And the How to all Emerson wrote is here. It is how we do a thing that counts. This may easily be proven. Let us say a man writes rhyme. Shall we, then, say he is a poet? If what he does makes him he is, then he is a poet; but assume that the rhyming doggerel he has written is such as can be written by anyone with even a limited knowledge of the language: that man is not a poet; the how element is lacking. If we can understand how to do a thing, well and good; if we can understand this, and also know how the other man does it, better; but "Half the world, it is said, knows not how the other half lives," Emerson says, quoting from an old saying. Our Behaviour, our manners, are of great use to us in our conduct of life, as Emerson points out in this: "Manners aim to facilitate life, to get rid of impediments, and bring the man pure to energies. They aid our dealings and conversation, as a railway aids travelling, by getting rid of all avoidable obstructions of the road, and leaving nothing to be conquered but pure space. These forms





very soon become fixed, and a fine sense of propriety is cultivated with the more heed, that it becomes a badge of civil and social distinctions. Thus grows up Fashion, an equivocal semblance, the most puissant, the most fantastic and frivolous, the most feared and followed, and which morals and violence assault in vain." If manners are what they should be, another step toward that perfect culture which is one of the prime things in our conduct of life, is taken. The cultured man is the gentleman; a term often misused, but still understood for what it should mean. The gentleman's conduct of life is what it should be. He relies upon himself, he asserts himself, and so is welcomed by others; no one is at ease if there is one in the company who is not self-possessed. Emerson says, in developing this idea, "A gentleman never dodges;" "A circle of men perfectly well-bred, would be a company of sensible person, in which every man's native manners and character appeared." "The basis of good manners is self-reliance." "A scholar may be a well-bred man, or he may not. The enthusiast is introduced to polished scholars in society, and is chilled and silenced by finding himself not in their element. They all have somewhat which he has not, and, is seems, ought to have."

Worship seems to Emerson to be as essential as the other elements in the makeup of a cultured man, the man who knows what the conduct of life should be. "We are born believing," he says, and adds that "In the last chapters, we treated some particulars of the question of culture, But the whole state of man





is a state of culture; and its flowering and completion may be described as religion, or worship." The culture of the man, in a way, determines his worship, because "The god of the cannibals will be a cannibal, of the crusaders a crusader, and of the merchants a merchant." We ape others, of course; the costermonger's wife, if she can contrive it, will walk like the duchess whose house she serves; the shop girl's rhinestones are

The Age of  
Belief

imitations of the diamonds of Fifth Avenue.

And in like manner, the religion of the better classes is sure, in time, to be the religion of the lower. If the ruler of a country be insincere, his subjects are affected measurably. Emerson points out that "The religion of the cultivated class, now, to be sure, consists in an avoidance of acts and engagements which it was once their religion to assume. But this avoidance will yield spontaneous forms in their due hour." And he adds, later, that "All the great ages have been ages of belief." Real success is measured by culture; culture is a phase of worship, or worship of culture, for they are interdependent; and hence proper worship we find regarded by Emerson as one of the essentials in our conduct of life.

"We live by our imaginations, our admirations, by our sentiments," says Emerson in his chapter on "Illusions" in "The Conduct of Life." This is undeniable; but there are different kinds of illusions, as he goes on to point out; "There

Some Illusions  
Are Good

are deceptions of the senses, deceptions of the passions, and the structural, beneficent illusions of sentiment and of the intellect." Some



illusions, then, are base, and delecterious, while others have their good effects. Still, the real value in all our conduct of life lies in knowing an illusion when one arises, and not being overcome and misled by it. It seems to me that the keynote of Emerson's views on the conduct of life is struck in this passage: "The intellect is stimulated by the statement of truth in a trope, and the will by clothing the laws of life in illusions. But the unities of Truth and of Right are not broken by the disguise. There need never be any confusion in these. In a crowded life of many parts and performers, on a stage of nations, or in the obscurest hamlet in Maine or California, the same elements offer the same choices to each new comer, and, according to his election, he fixes his fortune in absolute nature....There is no chance, and no anarchy, in the universe. All is system and gradation. Every god is there sitting in his sphere. The young mortal enters the hall of the firmament; there is he alone with them along, they pouring on him benedictions and gifts, and beckoning him up to their thrones. On the instant, and incessantly, fall snow-storms of illusions. He fancies himself in a vast crowd which sways this way and that, and whose movement and goings he must obey: he fancies himself poor, orphaned, insignificant. The mad crowd drives higher and thither, now furiously commanding this thing to be done, now that. What is he that he should resist their will, and think or act for himself? Every moment, new changes, and new showers of deceptions, to baffle and distract him. And when, by-and-by, for an instant, the air clears,

The Gods and  
Illusions



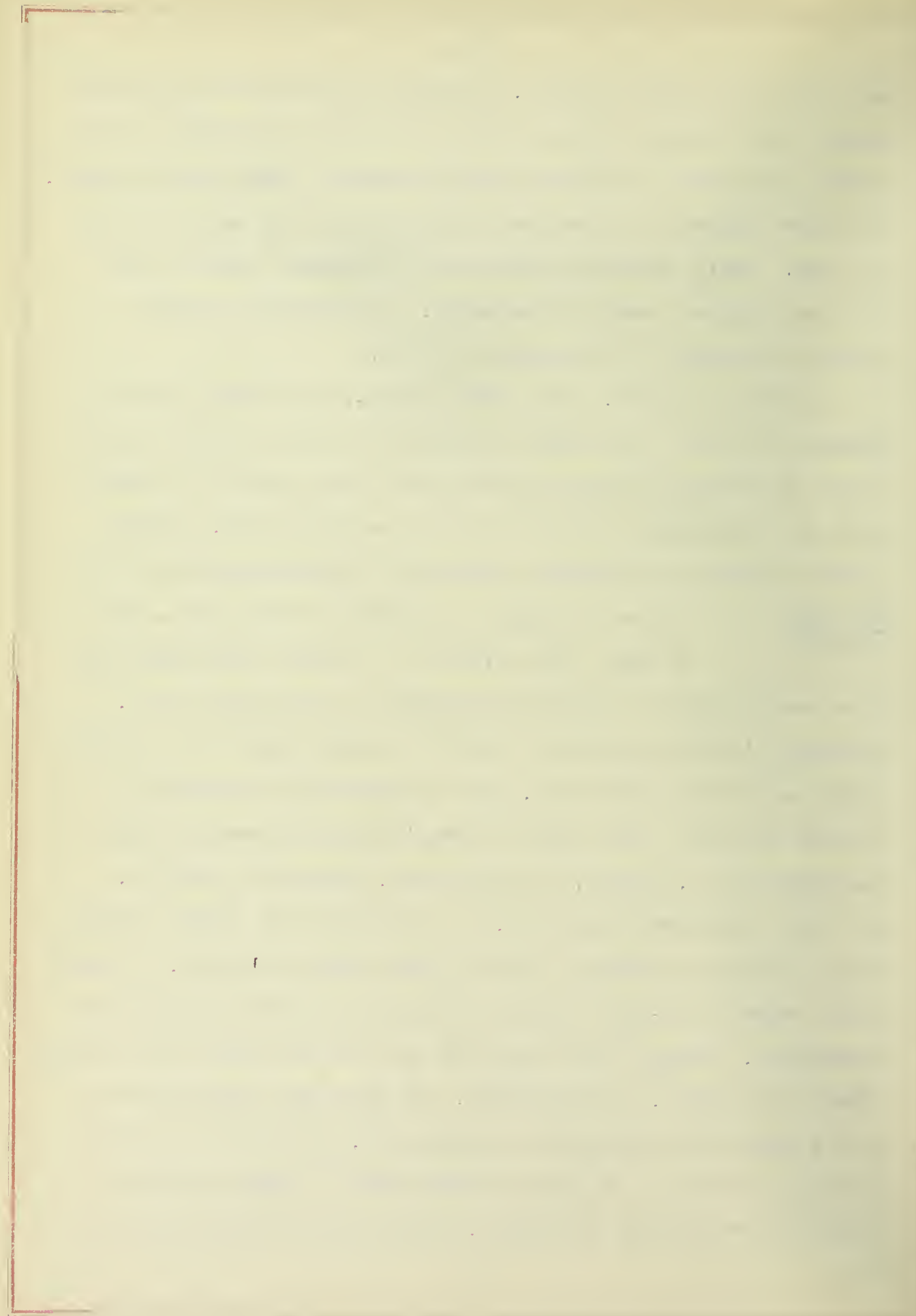


and the cloud lifts a little, there are the gods still sitting around him on their thrones,--they alone with him alone". The eternal verities of life are always present. They may be hidden, but never effaced. He who can find them has the secret of how to live. Their teachings become his knowledge; he is a part of their system. And by this means, is he guided into the proper knowledge of the conduct of life.

Conduct of life, like other things, may change with the passage of time. War seems to Emerson to have once been essential; the savage conflicts of early day were needful to establish the foundations on which we have later builded, because it was a factor in progress; temporary, and passing into disuse

War and Progress

(or so it seemed to Emerson in that day), and he says: "The student of history acquiesces the more readily in this copious bloodshed of the early annals, bloodshed in God's name, too, when he learns that it is a temporary and preparatory state, and does actively forward the culture of man." The reason for war's being preparatory was that through it, strong, and therefore, generally speaking, the more intellectual nations, in conquering the weaker, forced them to adopt the modes of life of the victor; that is, to adopt such a system in their conduct of life as had been proven more successful, through the victory of one and the loss of the other. "The strong tribe," Emerson says, "in which war has become an art, attack and conquer their neighbours, and teach them their arts and virtues." Progress is the result. When one civilization is overthrown by another, and a change takes place in



its wake, the weaker qualities die out, the stronger survive; and if, with Emerson, we look upon those things which in the long run succeed as being good, then war in early days accomplished good. The little clan, forced to live from hand to mouth, and in which every man had to be a warrior the larger part of his time in order that his tribe might have comparative security, had little or no time in which to become cultured.

The Iroquois Indians, a huge tribe, strong and dominant, lived in stockaded huts. Inside their inclosure they grew grains,

### War and Culture

in the cultivation of which the men took a part.

The Illinois Indians, a small tribe, ever fearing their neighbors to the east, were partially nomadic. They lived by hunting, and what little agrarian activity existed in a low form in their temporary encampments was done by the women. So it has been throughout history. For centuries the Chinese led the world in culture; they were a great nation. Across the China Sea were their kinsmen; the Japanese, among whom the office of samurai was the highest; and until western civilization, with its newer modes of warfare, touched the Japanese, he was a savage while the Chinese was a civilized man, comparatively speaking. Perhaps the greatest service of war in the past has been to give man self-confidence. Emerson says: "What does all this war, beginning from the lowest races and reaching up to man, signify? Is it not manifest that it covers a great and bene-

### Self-Help Necessary

ficent principle, which nature had deeply at heart? What is that principle? It is self-

help. Nature implants with life the instinct for self-help,





perpetual struggle to be, to resist opposition, to attain to freedom, to attain to a mastery, and the security of a permanent, self-defended being; and to each creature these objects are made so dear, that it risks its life continually in the struggle for these ends." We must not think, however, that this instinct is the only one of value: "The instinct of self-help is very early unfolded in the coarse and merely brute forms of war, only in the childhood and imbecility of the other instincts, and remains in that form only until their development. It is the ignorant and childish part of mankind that is the fighting part."

What, then, are the characteristics of the part of mankind that does not fight--that is not ignorant and childish? Emerson says that "At a certain stage of his progress, the man fights, if he be of a sound body and mind. At a certain higher stage, he makes no offensive demonstration, but is alert to repel injury, and of an unconquerable heart." This, then, is that which we should strive to gain, if we would be helped along a step further--by self-help always, let it not be forgotten--in our appreciation of the right conduct of life.

Thinking man is always seeking improvement; is always eager to reform and to be reformed; yet reform must be gone at cautiously. "I do not wish to be absurd and pedantic in reform," Emerson says, because the rabid reformer, the man dominated by

Judicious  
Reform Is Good

a sheer mania for changing what is into something that yet is not, is sure to

place himself in "an absolute isolation from the advantages of





civil society." In his essay on "Man the Reformer" Emerson points out that judicious reform is good, and to be desired; and he says that "Every great and commanding moment in the annals of the world is the triumph of some enthusiasm." Reform is needed in America, he believes; and he outlines the way in which it should come: "Let our affection flow out to our fellows; it would operate in a day the greatest of all revolutions. It is better to work on institutions by the sun than by the wind. The state must consider the poor man, and all voices must speak for him. Every child that is born must have a just chance for his bread. Let the amelioration in our laws of property proceed from the concession of the rich, not from the grasping of the poor." And what a telling phrase this is, well to be used today against the advocates of 'direct action'! "Let us begin by habitual imparting.....Love would put a new face on this weary old world in which we dwell as pagans and enemies too long, and it would warm the heart to see how fast the vain diplomacy of statesmen, the impotence of armies, and navies, and lines of defence, would be superseded by this unarmed child." Reform, we see, should be brought about gradually. It can never be accomplished by sudden action, if it is real reform, but must result as the outcome of a change in the heart and mind of every individual man.

We have previously seen what Emerson thought of reform and reformers in general; and now we shall see his specialization, Value of Reformers his localization, of the same subject, which he treats in "New England Reformers." After dis-



cussing the fervor for reform and change which swept New England from 1820-1844, Emerson satirically exclaims "What a fertility of projects for the salvation of the world!" After a few lines of humorous wit, however, he seriously says that "with this din of opinion and debate, there was a keener scrutiny of institutions and domestic life than any we had known, there was sincere protesting against existing evils, and there were changes of employment dictated by conscience." There is often a reaction against reform; a period of relaxation follows a period of exertion: the world seems to enjoy a sort of moral holiday after it has been keyed up to a pitch of high idealism and altruism, as is manifest in 1920, following the close of the World War. Emerson, in 1844, said that "No doubt, there was

"Sufficiency of  
The Private Man"

plentiful vapouring, and cases of backsliding might occur. But in each of

these movements emerged a good result, a tendency to the adoption of simpler methods, and an assertion of the sufficiency of the private man." It is upon the latter fact that he lays emphasis in this essay-lecture, saying that the reform in education, in which it became realized that it was not essential to a man's success in business that he know Greek, had that effect which Emerson thinks the most important of all: "One tendency appears alike in the philosophical speculation, and in the rudest democratical movements, through all the petulance and all the puerility, the wish, namely, to cast aside the superfluous, and arrive at short methods, urged, as I suppose, by an intui-





tion that the human spirit is equal to all emergencies, alone, and that man is more often injured than helped by the means he uses. I conceive this gradual casting off of material aids, and the indication of growing trust in the private, self-supplied powers of the individual, to be the affirmative principle of the recent philosophy: and that it is feeling its own profound truth, and is reaching forward at this very hour to the happiest conclusions." If they did naught else, then, the New England reformers made people think for themselves: and the self-reliant man is a long way on the road to self-realisation and to an understanding of the conduct of life. There is something radical about reform, even in conservative New England; and Emerson asks, rightly, "Is not every man sometimes a radical in politics? Men are conservatives when they are least vigorous, or when they are most luxurious."

This idea of conservatism is developed and expanded in an essay on "The Conservative," in which Emerson says "There is always a certain meanness in the argument of conservatism, joined with a certain superiority in its fact. It affirms because it holds," Is there such a thing in existence as a pure conservative? Emerson thinks not, and he says: "Moreover, as we have already shown that there is no pure reformer, so it is to be considered that there is no pure conservative, no man who from the beginning to the end of his life maintains the defective institutions; but he who sets his face like a flint against every novelty, when approached in the confidence of conversation, in the presence of

Think for Yourself  
No Pure Conservative Exists



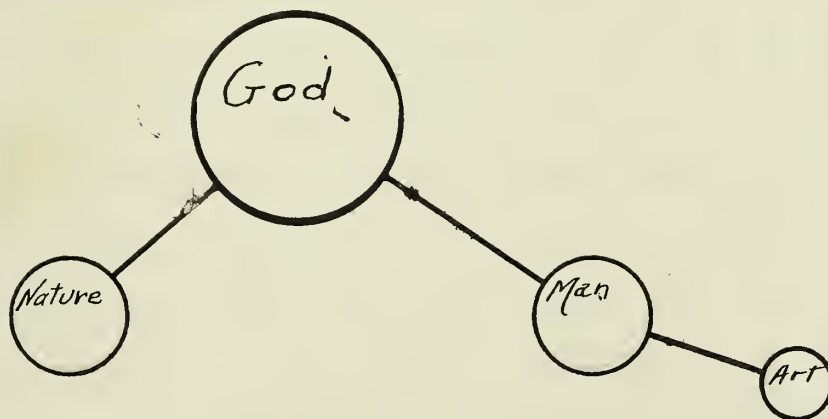
friendly and generous persons, has also his gracious and relenting motions, and espouses for the time the cause of man; and even if this be a short-lived emotion, yet the remembrance of it in private hours mitigates his selfishness and compliance with custom."

Certainly the transcendentalist is not a conservative; one should hardly think that the moments in which he "espouses the cause of man" were rare; and although Transcendentalism, as discussed by Emerson in his essay on "The Transcendentalist", was

The Higher Relationships

not new, it was none the less radical. The idealism that motivated the transcendentalists

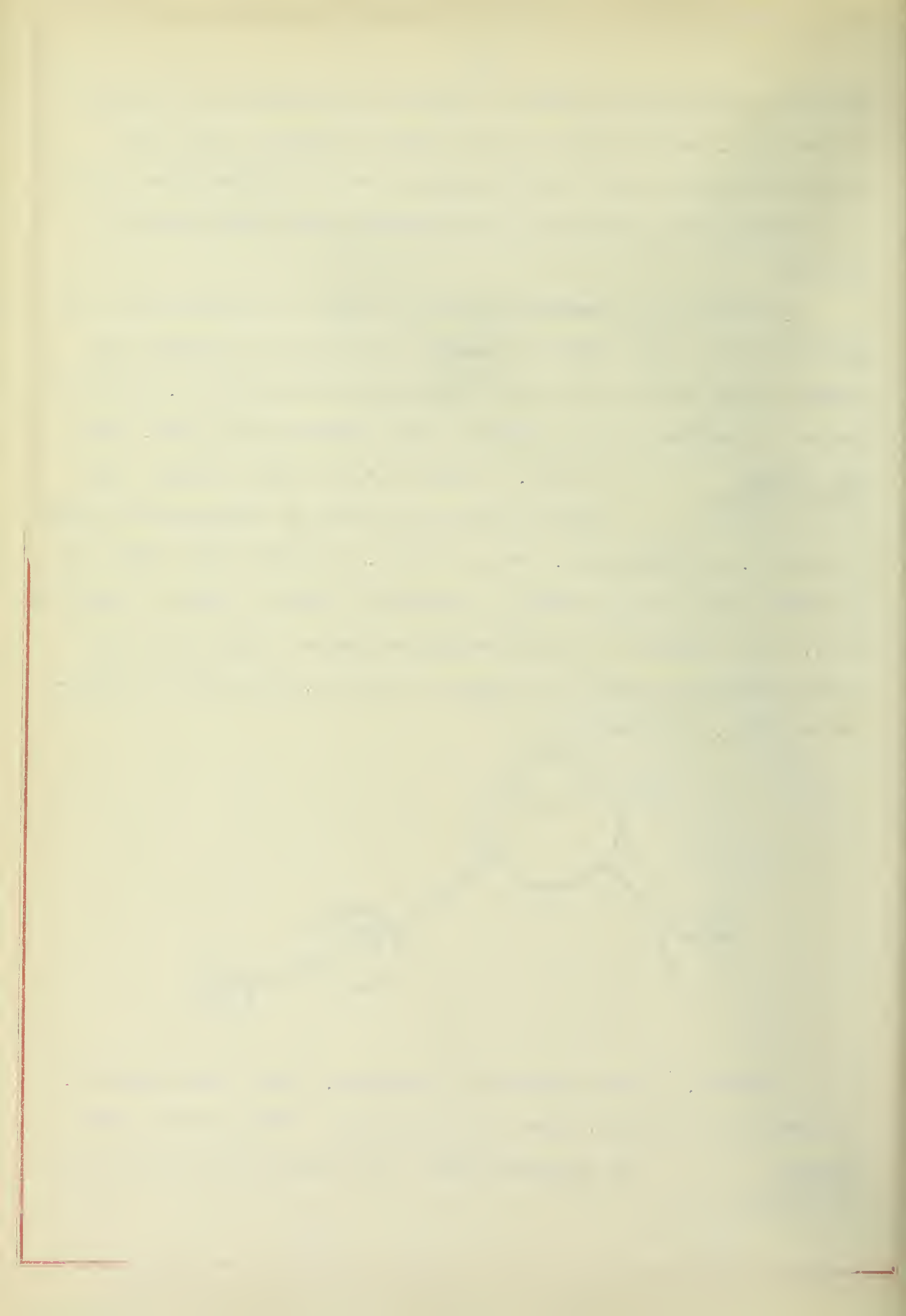
of Boston, of Brook Farm, was not novel, "but the very oldest of thoughts cast into the mould of these new times." What an idealist does, is to connect the Thing with the Idea--to establish that relationship expressed in Emerson's doctrine, which may be represented thus, diagrammatically:



Emerson, in explication of the above, says: "The idealist, in speaking of events, sees them as spirits. He does not deny

Events As Spirite

the sensuous fact: by no means; but he will not





see that alone." It is all well and good for us to examine, and to make use of, circumambient, material nature; but it is essential to our well-being that we see the true reality behind it all: the source, of which this nature is but the effluence.

Our attention is called to the fact that "Although, as we have said, there is no pure Transcendentalist, yet the tendency to respect the intuitions, and to give them, at least in our creed, all authority over our experience, has deeply coloured the conversation and poetry of the present day". Hence, it is proper that we investigate the effects of this upon the scholar in America, and upon the rising generations in the America of Emerson's day. In his essay, "The American Scholar," Emerson

The Scholar  
Knows

notices that the scholar is the man who realises the oneness of Nature, God, Art, Man--

"Thus to him, to this schoolboy under the bending dome of day, is suggested, that he and it proceed from one root; one is leaf and one is flower; relation, sympathy, stirring in every vein. And what is that root? Is not that the soul of his soul?--A thought too bold--a dream too wild. Yet when this spiritual light shall have revealed the law of more earthly natures--when he has learned to worship the soul, and to see that the natural philosophy that now, is, is only the first gropings of its gigantic hand, he shall look forward to an ever expanding knowledge as to a becoming creator. He shall see, that nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to it part for part. One is seal, and one is print. Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind. Its laws are the laws of his own mind. Nature then becomes to





him the measure of his attainments. So much of nature as he is ignorant of, so much of his own mind does he not yet possess. And, in fine, the ancient precept, "Know thyself," and the modern precept, "Study nature," become at last one maxim."

It is, of course, but to be expected that the transcendentalist in Emerson should speak thus, in discussing the American The Youth and The State scholar; but not all our land is made up of scholars; what of the youth? Emerson says, in his essay on "The Young American," in speaking of the attitude of the youth of the land toward the state: "But the wise and just man will always feel that he stands on his own feet; that he imparts strength to the state, not receives security from it; and that if all went down, he and such as he would quite easily combine in a new and better constitution." An egotistic point of view for the young man to take, no doubt; but if it is guided by common-sense, it will win out. What a challenge there is to the American of today in Emerson's appeal: "I call upon you, young men, to obey your heart, and be the nobility of this land!"

#### Emerson and Plato on Love

It is of interest and value in this connection, to compare the thought of Emerson, after considering his adjurations to "The Young American," with Plato, whom we may consider as the exponent in his day of those ideas which, in a modified and modernized form, Emerson stood for in the nineteenth century.

How much Emerson owed to Plato, Socrates, and other "ancients who called beauty the flowering of virtue," we do not know; but certainly there are many points of marked similarity



in the philosophy of the American transcendentalist and that of the persons reported in the dialogues in "The Symposium." This rather surprising similitude may readily be pointed out by means of parallel passages. It goes still further, however; we can divide Emerson's treatment of his subject into three parts, and find corresponding divisions in the writings of the ancients.

The division of a tripartite nature in Emerson's essay on Love is just what one would expect, having read others of The Tripartite Division essays. He divides, more or less distinctly, the entire field thus; Physical, social, spiritual. As in his essay on Compensation, where he draws illustrations first from physical nature, the sciences, and mechanical arts, then from the activities of society, and finally deals with the effects of compensatory action on the soul of man, so too in his essay on Love he describes it first as the physical passion, next in relation to its effect upon society and the state, and at last shows us how it affects man's inner self. Accordingly, I have followed in this paper the order in which Emerson takes up the three phases of the subject, have quoted passages from his essay illustrative of the different points, and have compared them with passages taken from "The Symposium" which I believe portray, if not an exact, at all events a measurably equivalent idea of the subject. In doing this, only such passages from each work as are clearly and obviously indicative of the writer's attitude on the subject, have been chosen. This is done briefly, in order to show first of all wherein the points of similarity lie. The later part of the paper is concerned with a general comparison, in which





no attempt is made at continuity, but which aptly and amply illustrates, with but little comment, the parallel ideas found in Emerson and older writers.

### I. Physical

Emerson regarded the physical basis of love--the desire of the sexes for one another--to be good, and essential.

#### "Nature's Winning Pictures"

He says: "The strong bent of nature is seen in the proportion which this topic of personal relations usurps in the conversation of society;" and, "All mankind love a lover. The earliest demonstrations of complacency and kindness are nature's most winning pictures." Further on, he says: "I have been told, that is some public discourses of mine my reverence for the intellect has made me unjustly cold to the personal relations. But now I almost shrink at the remembrance of such disparaging words. For persons are love's world, and the coldest philosopher cannot recount the debt of the young soul wandering here in nature to the power of love, without being tempted to unsay, as treasonable to nature, aught derogatory to the social instincts."

Eryximachus, one of the speakers in "The Symposium," has this to say of love: "....whereas other gods have poems and hymns made in their honor by the poets, who are so many, the great and glorious god, Love, has not a single panegyrist or encomiast.....This mighty deity has been neglected wholly!" Phaedrus, too, said that Love is not only the oldest of the gods, but "he is also the source of the greatest benefits to us." One must make allowance, in comparing

#### Love as a Benefit



the Greek and American discourses on love, for differences chronological, religious, and environmental; but when this is done, it is at once apparent that the gist of Emerson's remarks on this phase of the subject may without doubt be paralleled by the underlying sense of what Eryximachus and Phaedrus said at Agathon's banquet.

## II. Social

Always interested in the welfare of society in the large, Emerson of course found in the love of two individuals a cause and reason for a greater and more inclusive love, which made for the better understanding of humankind. To quote; "By conversation with that which is in itself excellent, magnanimous, lowly, and just, the lover comes to a warmer love of these nobilities, and a quicker apprehension of them. Then he passes from loving them in one to loving them in all, and so is the one beautiful soul only the door through which he enters to the society of all true and pure souls....And, beholding in many souls the traits of the divine beauty, and separating in each soul that which is divine from the taint which it has contracted in the world, the lover ascends to the highest beauty, to the love and knowledge of the Divinity, by steps on this ladder of created souls." The latter part of the foregoing passage shows Emerson's ever-present idea of God being manifested in all things, and attainable by all. This quotation might equally well, perhaps be taken as representative of the third division of his thought on love, namely, the spiritual side of it; but it harmonizes so thoroughly, and



is such an orderly progression from his social ideas on the subject, that I have chosen to quote it here as well as later. Probably the most concise and definite statement of the social side of love is given by Emerson in the following: "For it is the nature and end of this relation, that they (lovers) should represent the human race to each other. All that is in the world, which is or ought to be known, is cunningly wrought into the texture of man, of woman."

Phaedrus, one of the speakers quoted by Plato, was at one with Emerson in saying that social progress was best secured through love. To quote; "For the principle which ought to be the guide of men who would nobly live--that principle, I say, neither kindred, nor honor, nor wealth, nor any other motive is able to implant as surely as love. Of what am I speaking? Of the sense of honor and dishonor, without which neither states nor individuals ever do any good or great work." Emerson has told us that through the love of individuals there is attained an appreciation of good qualities in others than the beloved; and here Phaedrus corroborates it.

### III. Spiritual

"Every promise of the soul has innumerable fulfilments," says Emerson; "each of its joys ripens into a new want." And he tells us definitely the divine purpose back of human love, when he says: "Therefore, the Deity sends the glory of youth before the soul, that it may avail itself of beautiful bodies as aids

The Celestial  
Through the Earthly

to its recollection of the celestial





good and fair; and the man beholding such a person in the female sex runs to her, and finds the highest joy in contemplating the form, movement, and intelligence of this person, because it suggests to him the presence of that which indeed is within the beauty, and the cause of the beauty." It is perhaps not amiss to quote here part of a passage already used under division II: "And, beholding in many souls the traits of the divine beauty, and separating in each soul that which is divine from the taint which it has contracted in the world, the lover ascends to the highest beauty, to the love and knowledge of the Divinity, by steps on this ladder of created souls." This passage, as already mentioned, is closely connected with the social idea; but hear Emerson further: "But things are ever grouping themselves according to higher or more interior laws. Neighbourhood, size, numbers, habits, persons lose by degrees their power over us. Cause and effect, real affinities, the longing for harmony between the soul and the circumstance, the progressive, idealizing instinct, predominate later, and the step backward from the higher to the lower relations is impossible. Thus even love, which is the deification of persons, must become more impersonal every day. Of this at first it gives no hint....the soul is wholly embodied, and the body is wholly ensouled." And his final statement of the spiritual nature and purpose of real love is thus given: "At last they discover that all which at first drew them together,--those once sacred features, that magical play of charms,--was deciduous, had a prospective end, like the scaffolding by which the house was built; and the purification of the intellect and the heart, from



The True  
Purpose of Love

year to year, is the real marriage, fore-  
seen and prepared from the first, and

wholly above their consciousness....Thus are we put in training for a love which knows not sex, nor person, nor partiality, but which seeks virtue and wisdom everywhere, to the end of increasing virtue and wisdom. We are by nature observers, and thereby learners. That is our permanent state. But we are often made to feel that our affections are but tents of a night. Though slowly and with pain, the objects of the affections change, as the objects of thought do. There are moments when the affections rule and absorb the man, and make his happiness dependent upon a person or persons. But in health the mind is presently seen again,--its overarching vault, bright with galaxies of immutable lights, and the warm loves and fears that swept over us as clouds, must lose their finite character and blend with God, to attain their own perfection. But we need not fear that we can lose anything by the progress of the soul. The soul may be trusted to the end. That which is so beautiful and attractive as these relations must be succeeded and supplanted only by what is more beautiful, and so on for ever."

Eryximachus said: "Furthermore, all sacrifices and the whole art of divination, which is the art of communion between gods and men,--these, I say, are concerned only with the salvation and the healing power of love;" and Aristophanes declared that "if we are friends of God and reconciled to him we shall find our own true loves, which rarely happens in this world....my words have a wider application; and I believe that if all of us obtained our





love, and each one had his particular beloved, thus returning to our original nature, then our race would be happy." Allowance must here be made for the fact that the soul, as understood in God and The Soul Emerson's time and today, was not regarded as an entity in any thing like the same manner by the men of whom Plato writes; but nevertheless the references to "God" or "the God" found in "The Symposium" are obviously illustrative of ideas which may with justice be compared to Emerson's. Socrates, reporting his conversation with Biotima, said that love "is a great spirit, and like all that is spiritual he is intermediate between the divine and the mortal," and further, that love is the power "Which interprets and conveys to the gods the prayers and scarifices of men, and to men the commands and rewards of the gods; and this power spans the chasm which divides them, and in this all is bound together, and through this the arts of the prophet and the priest, their sacrifices and mysteries and charms, and all prophecy and incantation, find their way. For God mingles not with man; and through this power all the intercourse and speech

"Spiritual Wisdom" of God with man, whether awake or asleep, is carried on. The wisdom which understands this is spiritual; all other wisdom, such as that of arts or handicrafts, is mean and vulgar." How greatly this passage resembles, even in context, that of Emerson, wherein he says "But things are ever grouping themselves according to higher or more interior laws," and the other: "At last they discover that all which at first drew them together.....was deciduous, had a prospective end.. ..the warm loves and fears that swept over us as clouds, must lose



their finite character and blend with God, to attain their own perfection."

I believe that the passages I have chosen and quoted above, from Emerson and from the different speakers mentioned in "The Symposium", illustrate well enough the main divisions of the subject as made by Emerson, and as corroborated in the speeches of the earlier men. To sum up: Both thought that love had its definite place as a matter affecting individuals; that it affected society; and that through it man attained to communion with Divinity.

The following passages from Emerson and "The Symposium" might be grouped under one or another of the foregoing three heads; but to include them there, with the necessary comments on each, would be to make this division of the subject much longer than advisable; and so I have set them down here, with no comment. In nearly all cases, even the wording of them is so similar that it would be useless to point out the similarity of thought in them; and where there is a difference, due to the inherent differences in the Christian thought of Emerson and the pagan philosophy of the men in "The Symposium," I believe that even a casual comparison will show how nearly alike were the thoughts on love of our American thinker-poet and the early Greek philosophers.

### Parallel Passages

#### Love Selects Youth

Emerson: "For, though the celestial rapture falling out of heaven seizes only upon those of tender age..."  
 "The delicious fancies of youth reject the least savour of a mature philosophy..."





"The natural association of the sentiment of love with the heyday of the blood seems to require, that in order to portray it in vivid tints, which every youth and maid should confess to be true to their throbbing experience, one must not be too old."

Symposium: "For, in the first place, Phaedrus, he is the youngest; (of the gods) and of his youth he is himself the witness, fleeing out of the way of age, which is swift enough, surely, swifter than most of us like: yet he can not be overtaken by him; he is not a bird of that feather; youth and love live and move together."

### Strength and Courage from Love

Emerson: "The like force has the passion over all his nature. It expands the sentiment; it makes the clown gentler, and gives the coward heart. Into the most pitiful and abject it will infuse a heart and courage to defy the world, so only it have the countenance of the beloved object."

"They try and weigh their affection, and, adding up costly advantages, friends, opportunities, exult in discovering that willingly, joyfully, they would give all as a ransom for the beautiful, the beloved head, not one hair of which shall be harmed."

Symposium: "Love will make men dare to die for their beloved."

"The interests of rulers require that their subjects should be poor in spirit, and there there should be no strong bond of friendship or society among them; and love, above all other motives, is likely to inspire this, as our Athenian tyrants learned by experience."

### Grace and Beauty from Love

Emerson: "It is the dawn of civility and grace in the coarse and rustic."

"Beauty, whose revelation to man we now celebrate, welcome as the sun wherever it pleases to shine, which pleases everybody with it and with themselves, seems sufficient to itself. The lover can not paint his maiden to his fancy poor and solitary...she teaches his eye why Beauty was pictured with Loves and Graces attending her steps."

Symposium: "The actions of a lover have a grace which ennobles them."

"But what if man had eyes to see the true beauty--the divine beauty, I mean...would that be an ignoble life?"

### Poetry from Love

Emerson: "It is a fact often observed, that men have





written good verses under the inspiration of passion, who cannot write well under any other circumstances."

Symposium: "For in the first place he is a poet, and he is also the source of poetry in others, which he could not be if he were not himself a poet. And at the touch of him every one becomes a poet, even though he had no music in him before."

### Sensual and Spiritual Love

Emerson: "If, however, from too much conversing with material objects, the soul was gross, and misplaced its satisfaction in the body, it reaped nothing but sorrow; body being unable to fulfill the promise which beauty holds out; but if, accepting the hint of these visions and suggestions which beauty makes to his mind, the soul passes through the body, and falls to admire strokes of character, and the lovers contemplate one another in their discourses and their actions, then they pass to the true palace of beauty, more and more inflame their love of it, and by this love extinguishing the base affection, as the sun puts out the fire by shining on the hearth, they become pure and hallowed."

Symposium: "Evil is the vulgar lover who loves the body rather than the soul, and who is inconstant because he is a lover of the inconstant; and therefore when the bloom of youth which he was desiring is over, he takes wings and flies away, in spite of all his words and promises; whereas the love of the noble mind, which is in union with the unchangeable, is everlasting."

Turning now from the most generalized of Emerson's ideas, let us take up in detail various phases of the manifold subjects touched upon in the large in the preceding chapter. Part of Nature we may well conceive as consisting of Self-Reliance; and surely Spiritual Laws, Compensation, and History comprise chapters in the great book of life.

In this division of Emerson's essays, he touches upon such impersonalities as Compensation, and upon such personalities as Character. I shall discuss each essay briefly, using occasional quotations illustrative of the points in question, and in my exposition, shall follow the order in which Emerson arranged the "Essays, First and Second Series." Each is such an integer that



I feel that it is impossible to relate all the essays, as I did in Group I.

### History

"Man is explicable by nothing less than all his history. Without hurry, without rest, the human spirit goes forth from the beginning to embody every faculty, every thought, every emotion, which belongs to it, in appropriate events." Emerson goes on from this admirable starting point to show us that since it is essential to our understanding of man that we read the history which is the record of the "one mind common to all individual men," it is requisite that we know how to read history. He tells us how to read in order to gain this knowledge: "The student is to read history actively and not passively; to esteem his own life the text, and books the commentary." It is only by relating things that they have value to us. Anything standing alone is valueless, as much as a man stranded solitary on a deserted island would be valueless to society. When we read history, we are imbued with a desire to make it lifelike. Caesar is never an abstraction to us; we accompany him on his marches through Gaul. After all, the material thing, whether it be a conflict of armed men called forth by a general, or a book written by a poet, is but a manifestation of the Idea--the God which is everywhere. The spirit of the man who directed the battle, the spirit of the poet who wrote the book, are one with ours, for both emanated from the great and inexhaustible Source. This is the reason why we put ourselves in the place of Napoleon watching from his carriage the battle at Waterloo; why we share with Milton in feeling the tortures of the damned souls, creatures of his creative intellect.





We are related to all men, through our common origin. "Strasburg cathedral is a material counterpart of the soul of Erwin of Steinbach. The true poem is the poet's mind; the true ship is the ship-builder," Emerson tells us.

### Self-Reliance

"Trust thyself; every heart vibrates to that iron string." An egocentric way of looking at life in the large, perhaps; but, if this tenet be guided and its rigor ameliorated by understanding, its success is certain. Subservience never wins out. The soul is restrained by hearkening ever to the counsels of others. The intellect declines when its own adjurations are not regarded. If we would succeed, we must not be too greatly concerned with public opinion. Emerson says that "What I must do, is all that concerns me; not what the people think." But we must not carry this to an extreme. Too great an individualism results in anarchy, mental if not social. No one can stand entirely alone. It is essential for our own selfish best interest that we conform somewhat to the ideas and modes of life of others; and Emerson is frank enough to warn us that "For nonconformity the world whips you with its displeasure." It has been previously pointed out that it is natural for a human being to admire, and, in a measure, to worship great men. They are the sources of our inspiration; but we must not be too deferential, too humble, overly self-abasing in the presence, actual or imagined, of the great men of the world's history. "Our reading, Emerson remarks, "is mendicant and sycophantic. In history, our imagination makes fools of us, plays



us false. Kingdom and lordship, power and estate, are a gaudier vocabulary than private John and Edward in a small house and common day's work; but the things of life are the same to both; the sum-total of both is the same." We must not think that these great ones of the past and present have exhausted every possibility: "Why all this deference to Alfred, and Scanderbeg, and Gustavus? Suppose they were virtuous: did they wear out virtue? As great a stake depends upon your private act today, as followed their public and renowned steps. When private men shall act with vast views, the lustre will be transferred from the actions of kings to those of gentlemen." And this is the keynote of the essay: Be self-reliant, but that need not mean that you should be egotistical. The egotistical man is rarely one of great actions. Be self-reliant and do great things, and you are one of the great men.

### Compensation

Every false step we make takes us nearer to the precipice. Every good deed we do ennobles us. There is a recompense for all things, good and bad. Justice is inescapable. The king who made himself great by plunder and ravage is scorned today. The martyrs of yesterday are today saints. Sooner or later, your sin will find you out. In his essay on "Compensation," Emerson points out the evidences of compensatory action throughout the universe, material and spiritual. He gives a host of examples, which it is not necessary to refer to here in detail. A single citation of the method Emerson uses in presenting evidences of balance,





of compensation, will suffice: "An inevitable dualism bisects nature, so that each thing is a half, and suggests another thing to make it whole; as spirit, matter; man, woman; subjective, objective; in, out; upper, under; motion, rest; yea, nay." Through all of this bipartite division of the universe, the soul is striving to assert itself, and it is through that that progress is made, in spite of the compensatory change and interchange which rules all things: "The soul strives amain to live and work through all things. It would be the only fact. All things shall be added unto it,--power, pleasure, knowledge, beauty."

### Spiritual Laws

This striving of the soul, told of above, is not dictated by our intellect: "A little consideration of what takes place around us every day would shew us that a higher law than that of our will regulates events; that our painful labours are very unnecessary, and altogether fruitless; that only in our easy, simple, spontaneous action are we strong, and by contenting ourselves with obedience we become divine." Emerson would have us act in the way through which he so often arrived at his conclusion--what has often been called "divine guess." He tells us that each of us has his vocation, which will be pointed out if we are natural men, and act according to our natures; we must not make a choice that results in a partial fulfilment only; the entire being must enter into the real choice: "Until he can manage to communicate himself to others in his full stature and proportion as a wise and good man, he does not yet find his vocation." We must act according to the dictates of our conscience, and be guided to the right by the





spiritual laws which are higher, more permanent, better than any our intellect can formulate.

### Friendship

"I awoke this morning with devout thanksgiving for my friends, the old and the new," Emerson says; and describes what to him is good and noble and true in friendship: "Pleasant are these jets of affection, which relume a young world for me again. Delicious is a just and firm encounter of two in a thought, in a feeling. How beautiful, on their approach to this beating heart, the steps and forms of the gifted and the true!" These friends are God-given, Emerson would have us understand. It is through them that we progress, because the word, the action, of a true friend, is a help to the evolution of our own souls; and there is a great value which we should place on the friend; "No advantages, no powers, no gold or force can be any match for him." A friend, as we have seen, can be of the greatest use to us; but this use we must not seek to make temporary, or have it materialize too soon. Bonds stronger than those of temporal utility must bind us and our friends, if we would have the right to call them friends. Friendships should not be things of passions, should not move like the avalanche, but should be like "the Naturlangsamkeit, which hardens the ruby in a million years, and works in duration, in which prized, perhaps, of all virtues, and it is with the friend that we can best afford to be utterly and absolutely sincere. We must stand in true relations to him. Our hearts must be as one, ere the advantage of friendship may be derived.



Prudence

What is it to be prudent? Is it always to hesitate before we carry out in action a plan we have formulated in thought? Is prudence merely lack of sudden decision? Emerson says that "Prudence is the virtue of the senses. It is the science of appearances. It is the outmost action of the inward life. It is God taking thought for oxen. It moves matter after the laws of matter. It is content to seek health of body by complying with physical conditions, and health of mind by the laws of the intellect." But we must beware, in being what we think is prudent, that we do not regulate our acts by "the spurious prudence, making the senses final," which, Emerson would have us know, "is the god of sots and cowards, and is the subject of all comedy." Resolved in its ultimate analysis, we find a strikingly close connection between real prudence, as Emerson sees it, and self-reliance. The prudent man, like the self-reliant man, does not depend upon what others do or say entirely, but "takes the laws of the world, whereby man's being is conditioned, as they are, and keeps these laws, that <sup>(it)</sup> ~~(he)~~ may enjoy their proper good." If a man is confronted with a duty which he must do or leave, as his choice dictates, what is prudence then? Is it in taking half measures, in equivocation? No; "prudence does not consist in evasion, or in flight, but in courage, He who wishes to walk in the most peaceful parts of life with an serenity must screw himself up to a resolution. Let him front the object of his worst apprehension, and his stoutness will commonly make his fear groundless." Hereagain, we see the relationship of prudence





and self-reliance. With Polonius, we might well say "To thine own self be true; It follows then as night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."

### Heroism

The courage which it takes to make a decision such as the truly prudent man is often called upon to formulate, is well described by Emerson in his essay on "Heroism." This quality, or state of being, seems, like beauty, to be its own excuse for being; "There is somewhat in great actions, which does not allow us to go behind them. Heroism feels and never reasons, and therefore is always right." Emerson seems to have the idea of self-reliance frequently in mind, for notes of it appear frequently in "Heroism". This, however, one might expect; heroism is scarcely possible for the man who shrinks, who does not trust himself or his own convictions and thoughts. "Self-trust," Emerson tells us, "is the essence of Heroism. It is the state of the soul at war; and its ultimate objects are the last defiance of falsehood and wrong, and the power to bear all that can be inflicted by evil agents." Heroism is always bold, persistent; the hero is kind to his enemies, careless of renown or disrepute, truthful, and just. He is strong in his own strength, and neither needs nor asks shelter. Heroism is good humored and hilarious in its deeds: "It is a height to which common duty can very well attain, to suffer and to dare with solemnity. But these rare souls get opinion, success, and life, at so cheap a rate, that they will not soothe their enemies by petitions, or the show of sorrow, but wear their own habitual greatness." All men are at times



noble and exhibit touches of heroism in their actions; but these fits wherein one acts beyond his own nature are fleeting; it is reserved for him of truly heroic spirit to be consistent and persistent; to exhibit always, at all times and in all situations, those characters which make for heroism--to show such a front to all adversity that it scorns all deception, ruse, and convenience.

### The Over-Soul--

The idea of God permeating all things is found in Emerson's essay on "The Over-Soul". He says: "...within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE." We are led to see that the Over-soul, that part of us which is above and beyond the outer man, tells us that we are as nothing in the huge cosmogony of the universe. We are led to this discovery by the fact that the "soul in man is not an organ, but animates and exercises all the organs; is not a function, like the power of memory, of calculation, of comparison,--but uses these as hands and feet; is not a faculty, but a light; is not the intellect or the will, but the master of the intellect and the will; is the vast background of our being, in which they lie,--an immensity not possessed and that can not be possessed." Our real respect for and admiration of man is not directed to his functions, the activities of his organs of mind or body, but to the real man which is all of these and more than these. We are interested not in what he does, but in what he is. Man,--that concordance and manifestation of nature--is not the animal which thinks, but the physical vessel in which is the spark emanated from the Divine All.



Circles

The old saying that "there is nothing new under the sun" is carried out by Emerson in "Circles." He tells us that "Every ultimate fact is only the first of a new series." Our life is a perpetuation and repetition. We live as others did; others, in all essentials, shall live as we do. As in his essay on "History," here we find the thought that man is the real actor, not the circumstances or events in which he has a part. But for all that man does, representing himself, giving us an image of the life of a dweller in ancient Athens, or a precursor of what is to come, he "is not so much a workman in the world as he is a suggestion of that he should be. Men walk as prophecies of the next age."

Emerson warns us that a thinker is the most dangerous and vital force God can put on earth. Right thinking rouses and raises, bad thinking depresses and lowers. In our circles of life, in which we move and live and do, can come a force, the creation of a thinker, which can give reputation or destroy it. What is necessary, then? It is to "make the verge of today the new centre."

Intellect

As we have seen that man's real course in life is determined by the soul, or Over-soul, in the sense that the soul, which is the manifestation of the guiding spirit of all, is master of man's acts and thoughts, so too shall we see that one of the functions controlled by that soul--namely, the intellect--can and does have a great deal to do with determining his course of life. "What is the hardest task in the world?" the essayist asks; and





replies, "To think". He tells us further that we have but little means of keeping the thoughts we think where we want them to lie. This seems to be almost beyond our power, because "we are the prisoners of ideas. They catch us up for moments into their heaven, and so fully engage us, that we take no thought for the morrow, gaze like children, without an effort to make them our own."

Emerson tells us that it is as hard to find the truth in our thoughts by going into the world of open air nature as it is to sit us down in our libraries to ponder: "Yet thoughts are flitting before him" in spite of the difficulty we have in catching them. How to use the intellect, then, is our problem. Without the proper understanding of its usage, we are informed, all else avails us not at all: "The difference between persons is not in wisdom, but in art." We are advised, then, to have a constructive intellect.

A genius is valueless unless he can put on paper or into some working form, be it machinery or politics, the inspirations he receives. Here is the idea contained so many places in Emerson; the material world is a phenomenon of the Idea, and is not essential from the point of view of the giver of the idea; but often this phenomenal materialization is needful, if we would apprehend the idea. Emerson gives us the whole thing briefly thus: "When the spiritual energy is directed on something outward, then is it a thought." Relationship, here as elsewhere, we see is the ultimate essential, Absolute intellection must have its effluence in action. The idea must be represented in constructive thought.



There is not only a use in experience, but a pleasure, Emerson would have us understand. It is obvious that we always gain through Experience, that hard, but profitable teacher; but in addition to this is the element of surprise: "Life is a series of surprises, and would not be worth taking or keeping, if it were not. God delights to isolate us every day, and hide from us the past and the future." The one thing that determines what our lives shall be, since experience is or may be, common to all, is the temperament of the individual. Life is a series of surprises, yes; but hear Emerson further: "Life is a train of moods like a string of beads, and as we pass through them, they prove to be many-coloured lenses which paint the world their own hue, and each shows only what lies in its focus." This is the very idea contained in the statement that "life is nature seen through the lens of temperament." It is the way in which we look upon our experiences that colors and determines what profit we shall make of them. Fortunate the man whose temperament is not such that it limits his outlook upon life, or prevents him from making the most salutary use of his experiences; and the fate of him to whom temperament is a restraint only is regrettable. Emerson says that "Temperament is the veto or limitation-power in the constitution," and we readily see that it is such. The man whose temperament is of the sort that he can weigh and judge his experiences, may classify them, look upon them through a lens that colors them in bright hues that are unmistakable, and profit thereby. He who can not do so has his vision obscured always.





## Character

What is character? Emerson tells us that it is "a reserved force which acts directly by presence, and without means. It is conceived of as a certain undemonstrable force, a Familiar or Genius, by whose impulses the man is guided, but whose counsels he cannot impart; which is company for him, so that such men are often solitary, or if they chance to be social, do not need society, but can entertain themselves very well alone. "It is this difference in character which to a large extent determines the capabilities of a man. One man succeeds, it seems, by sheer plodding; and another by intuition or sheer intellect. In either case character is at the bottom of the matter. Power of character in a man we can see and evaluate in all activities. It is apparent in politics, in business, in art. One man's character influences not only his deeds, but those of others. This is a force which determines activities, and may direct results of great moment. When we meet a person of power in character, we are aware of it as well as if we looked upon a man of great physical strength. It dominates and colors and gives tone to his actions, so that his will expresses itself in all he does. If the character of those in association with him is weak, then that character must give way to the stronger. But after all, it is the effect of and the value in character to the individual which is of most vital importance, rather than what this character can be as a determiner to others; and in this relation Emerson tells us that "No change of circumstances can repair a defect of character;" and further "Character is centrality, the impossibility



of being displaced or overset." Then, if our character is strong, corresponding will be our treatment of the problems which come up, and which it is essential for each to solve; if weak, we again see a corresponding result. The reason for this is plain, Emerson feels, and gives it to us in unmistakable terms. He tells us that: "Character repudiates intellect, yet excites it; and character passes into thought, is published so, and then is ashamed before new flashes of moral worth."

### Manners

Certainly one of the things determined by character is represented in our manners. In fact, manners represent character in its entire being, because it is through manners that character is shown. "Manners aim to facilitate life," Emerson would have us know; "to get rid of impediments, and bring the man pure to energise." The manners of the master determine the manners of the slave, because character is conveyed through those manners. If a political leader does a certain thing, his constituents or followers are influenced to do likewise. Imitation of manners made the old house servant in the pre-war South of the United States a gentleman, regardless of color. But what happens when master men, men of high character, fully conveyed in manners, meet and associate with one another? Then we see another, and better effect of manners as representative of character: "The association of these masters with each other, and with men intelligent of their merits, is mutually agreeable and stimulating. The good forms, the happiest expressions of each, are repeated and adopted."



Gifts

"The only gift," Emerson assures us, "is a portion of theyself." The ring, the bit of gold, the jeweled bauble, is not a gift as Emerson sees it. It is not representative of its giver, any more than the artificial manners of the actor on the stage are indicative of the character of the actor. It is only when a gift is personal, in the highest sense of the word, that it is a true gift. What are these personal gifts? Let Emerson answer: ".... the poet brings his poem; the shepherd, his lamb; the farmer, corn; the miner, a gem; the sailor, coral and shells; the painter, his picture; the girl, a handkerchief of her own sewing." It would seem that Emerson believes that the character of the owner is expressed only in such gifts; that we gain nothing from our friend when he gives us a book he has not written, a chain he has not fashioned. "He is a good man who can receive a gift well," Emerson avers, and tells us that it is not a good thing, often, to receive gifts, even those of the personal nature; but he adds that "I fear to breathe any treason against the majesty of love, which is the genius and god of gifts, and to whom we must not affect to prescribe. Let him give kingdoms or flower-leaves indifferently. There are persons from whom we always expect fairy tokens; let us not cease to expect them."

Politics

In solitude or not; lost in our considerations of the Beyond; wherever our thoughts may dwell usually, or wherever our desires direct them, we must always keep an open and attentive eye for politics. Our life in the state of civilization, among other beings





is directed by politics; and it behooves us to understand somewhat of them. "Politics rest on necessary foundations," Emerson assures us, "and can not be treated with levity." The state is politics, viewed as one must see it to understand it. Its function is seeing that the people comprising it and giving it being and authority, are cared for. The people are the only interest of the state, viewed in the last analysis. All political considerations which involve property are but incidental, for, Emerson says, "property will always follow persons." There is no property without personality. This is true even in the common property such as a park, the natural national resources, all save the spirit and aspect of Nature itself, which man can never own. Emerson warns, however, that politics must not be too greatly concerned with limiting persons, which are its real interest, because "The boundaries of personal influence it is impossible to fix, as persons are organs of moral or supernatural force;" and in this statement one finds the relationship Emerson carries through in almost everything he writes--Man is but a symbol and a representation of something higher and greater, and this is manifested even in his politics.

### Nominalist and Realist

Genius, in the opinion of Emerson, or entire lack of it, is of much more frequent occurrence than mediocrity; and the perfectly balanced man, he believes, does not exist: "Great men, or men of great gifts, you shall easily find, but symmetrical men never." What is there which is real, and what is only an invention? Emerson says that "Our exaggeration of all fine characters



arises from the fact that we identify each in turn with the soul. But there are no such men as we fable; no Jesus, nor Pericles, nor Caesar, nor Angelo, nor Washington, such as we have made. We consecrate a great deal of nonsense, because it was allowed by great men. There is none without his foible." "I verily believe," he humorously adds, "if an angel should come to chaunt the chorus of the moral law, he would eat too much gingerbread, or take liberties with private letters, or do some precious atrocity." Your nominalist creates these men, your realist speaks of them as Emerson above: "Our native love of reality joins with this experience to teach us a little reserve, and to dissuade a too sudden surrender to the brilliant qualities of person;" and further, he says that "In the famous dispute with the Nominalists, the Realists had a good deal of reason." But this is not unalterable fiat; and Emerson hastens to tell us, in particular, that "After taxing Goethe as a courtier, artificial, unbelieving, worldly, I took up his book of Helena, and found him an Indian of the wilderness, a piece of pure nature like an apple or an oak, large as morning or night, and virtuous as a briar-rose." What then, is needful, if we would escape the evil of inclining too much in either direction? We have seen that there is no perfectly balanced or symmetrical man; but we can hope to approach a balance. Emerson, in giving a pointer to us in our search for the mid-ground between nominalism and realism, both of which are variants from actuality, says: "I would have no work of art, no speech, or action, or thought, or friend, but the best." And this we can take as being the sense of all that is contained in





the essays of this series: Proper relationship, proper selection, is to be our guide.

Our intellectual home is England, Emerson frequently reminds us; it is there the eyes of him imbued with travel-lust (with which Emerson is not greatly in sympathy) oftenest turn. This is, of course, but natural, and what might be expected, since America is after all a colony of England, Revolution or no Revolution. Perhaps, in 1833, when Emerson first visited England, it was more true than it is today that the American traveler is deeply interested in Great Britain. World-wide travel since that day has taken the man inspired with the fever to see, into all parts of the globe; and commonly his visit to England is social, rather than educational. But no matter if the traveler who has been so fortunate as to see all parts of the world, has taken advantage of the opportunity to go to Asia, Africa, southern Europe or South America before England, he is always asked, when speaking of his travels: "How do you like England? Did you go to Stratford-on-Avon? How does old Johnny Bull at home suit you?" The reason for our interest in England and all that is British, is easily explicable. We speak the same language, our political institutions, despite the ermine of George or the raving of the yellow press of America, are greatly alike. The student in America is nurtured on British mental food. He knows Dickens as well as O. Henry; he is as familiar with Wordsworth as with Poe; and who is there among us English-speakers in this colony removed Caesar-like from the mother, who does not claim Shakespeare as his own fully as much as any man's across the

Our Interest  
In England



sea?

We are undoubtedly attracted chiefly by the men of England. Unless he be ambassador or charge d'affaires, your traveller cares little or nothing for the politics and political institutions of the country in which he travels; but he is eager to see the people who support those institutions; and Emerson, we may be sure, felt the urge more strongly, than those of us who have not the first-hand interest in literature and in literary men that dominated

Emerson's I  
Indebtedness

him. He says, speaking of his first visit to England: "Like most young men of that time, I was much indebted to the men of Edinburgh, and of the Edinburgh Review--to Jeffrey, Mackintosh, Hallam, and to Scott, Playfair, and De Quincey, and my narrow and desultory reading had inspired the wish to see the faces of three or four writers--Coleridge, Wordsworth, Landor, De Quincey, and the latest and strongest contributor to the critical journals, Carlyle; and I suppose if I had sifted the reasons that led me to Europe, when I was ill and was advised to travel, it was mainly the attraction of these persons."

However, Emerson describes in considerable detail various characteristics of the English people, telling us of their modes of life, habits, whims and fancies, in a manner that differs somewhat from his usual essay style, in that he has recourse to a great deal of pure description and exposition.

After remarks relative to the racial descent of the inhabitants of the British Isles, with which we are not primarily concerned in this paper, Emerson goes on to tell

Abilities of  
The English



of the abilities of the people. He finds them possessed of outstanding abilities in the fields of literature, science, politics, art. Each of these abilities comes to them from a different source. Politically and in war they owe their prowess to their Norse ancestry; the Roman invasion is responsible for much of their art, particularly the ecclesiastical, although this influence descended directly through the Normans, who were part Viking as well. But whatever his abilities, each Britisher considers that he must have some skill; and the keynote of the division

"Abilities" in the series of essays on English traits is contained

"Excel in at  
Least One Thing"

in the following: "When Thor and his companions arrived at Utgard, he is told that

'nobody is permitted to remain here, unless he understand some art, and excel in it all other men.' The same question is still put to the posterity of Thor. A nation of labourers, every man is trained to some one art or detail, and aims at perfection in that; not content unless he has something in which he thinks he surpasses all other men. He would rather not do anything at all, than not do it well. I suppose no people have such thoroughness;--from the highest to the lowest, every man meaning to be master of his art.

In speaking of the manners of the English, Emerson says that he finds "the Englishman to be him of all men who stands firmest in his shoes," and adds the attitude of the Britisher toward others; "They require you to dare to be of your own opinion, and they hate the practical cowards who cannot in affairs answer directly yes or no." Perhaps the most significant description of





the English given in the chapter "Manners" is the following:

"They are positive, methodical, cleanly and formal, loving routine,

Tone of and conventional ways; loving truth and re-  
These Essays ligion, to be sure, but inexorable on points

of form." In this part of our paper on Emerson, no effort is made

to analyze, as has been done previously, because the entire group

of his essays on "English Traits" stand out by themselves, separ-

ate and distinct in tone and manner from his customary essay, such

as we have heretofore considered; and so a quotation or two,

illustrative of the central idea in each of these chapters, I

deem about all that is necessary in order to depict understandably

the way in which Emerson criticised England and the English.

He says that "The Teutonic tribes have a national single-  
ness of heart, which contrasts with the Latin races. The German

"National name has a proverbial significance of sincerity  
Singleness  
Of Heart" and honest meaning. The arts bear testimony to

it. The faces of clergy and laity in old

sculptures and illuminated missals are charged with earnest be-

lief." These same traits characterise the Englishman of today,

and the following quotation Emerson feels may apply also: "The

Northman Guttorm said to King Olaf, 'it is royal work to fulfill

royal words." Probity, then, is an outstanding characteristic

of the English.

A brief but pithy description of the character of the in-

habitants of the British-Isles is given in the eighth division

of "English Traits, where Emerson reports that the English race

are said to be morose, and adds: "I do not know that they have



sadder brows than their neighbors of northern climates. They are sad by comparison with the singing and dancing nations; not sadder, but slow and staid, as finding their joys at home. They, too, believe that where there is no enjoyment of life, there can be no vigour and heart in speech or thought: that your merry heart goes all the way, your sad one tires in a mile."

Another characteristic of the British is given in the chapter headed "Cockayne," where Emerson tells us that "The English are a nation of humorists. Individual right is pushed to the uttermost bound compatible with public order. Property is so perfect, that it seems the craft of that race, and not to exist elsewhere. The King cannot step on an acre which the peasant refuses to sell. A testator endows a dog or a rookery, and Europe cannot interfere with his absurdity. Every individual has his particular way of living, which he pushes to folly, and the decided sympathy of his compatriots is engaged to back up Mr. Crump's whim by statutes, and chancellors, and horse-guards." We might be led by this to think that the English are so individualistic and egoistic that their own undoing would be wrought by their excess of self-assertion and self-reliance; but Emerson tells us that "nature makes nothing in vain, and this little superfluity of self-regard in the English brain, is one of the secrets of their power and history. For it sets every man on being and doing what he really is and can." In other words, it is a further evidence of aid and help towards the understanding of that truth and honor which is so characteristic of the English.





Speaking of the material characteristics of England, Emerson tells us that "there is no country in which so absolute a "The Homage Paid to Wealth" homage is paid to wealth." This, at this late day, sounds a trifle strange to an American who is accustomed to hearing his country styled the "Land of the Dollar Mark," and a land whose monogrammed initials are supposed to represent the sign of coinage; a country where every person is supposed, or alleged, to be a money-grubber; yet Emerson says that "In America, there is a touch of shame when a man exhibits the evidences of large property, as if, after all, it needed apology. But the Englishman has pure pride in his wealth, and esteems it a final certificate. A coarse logic rules throughout all English souls;--if you have merit, can you not show it by your good clothes, and coach, and horses? How can a man be a gentleman without a pipe of wine?"

That this respect for money and the tangible evidence of possession of it harmonizes well with the attitude of the people toward their aristocracy is well shown in this passage, from the chapter on "Aristocracy." "The frame of society is aristocratic, the taste of the people is loyal. The estates, names and manners of the nobles flatter the fancy of the people and conciliate the necessary support." This would be a very bad thing were it not for one fact, which Emerson hastens to give us in the following: "The Norwegian pirate got what he could, and held it for his eldest son. The Norman noble, who was the Norwegian pirate baptised, did likewise. There was this advantage of western over oriental nobility, that this was recruited from below. English



history is aristocracy with the doors open. Who has courage and faculty, let him come in."

"The logical English," Emerson avers, "train a scholar as "The Logical English" they train an engineer. Oxford is a Greek factory, as Wilton mills weave carpet, and Sheffield grinds steel. They know the use of a tutor; as they know the use of a horse; and they draw the greatest amount of benefit out of both." It is this educational system in England which produces the culture which is a notable thing there; and which we, in a measure, lack, as evidenced in the following, wherein Emerson speaks of the young English collegians: "Their affectionate and gregarious ways reminded me at once of the habits of our Cambridge men, though I imputed to these English an advantage in their secure and polished manners."

In close harmony with the educational system of England is the religion of the country, for the clergy is educated to a man. Emerson tells us that we can not explain any people at the present day by their religion, but says that "the clergy for a thousand Religion and the National Stability years have been the scholars of the nation," and adds that "The national temperament deeply enjoys the unbroken order and tradition of its church; the liturgy, ceremony, architecture; the sober grace, the good company, the connection with the throne, and with history, which adorn it. And whilst it endears itself thus to men of more taste than activity, the stability of the English nation is passionately enlisted to its support, from its inextricable connection with the cause of public order, with politics and with the funds."



In view of the characteristics already pointed out, we are not surprised when Emerson tells us, speaking in his chapter on "Literature," that "A strong common sense, which it is not easy to unseat or disturb, marks the English mind for a thousand years: Commonsense of a rude strength newly applied to thought, The English as of sailors and soldiers who had lately learnt to read. They have no fancy, and never are surprised into a covert or witty word, such as pleased the Athenians and Italians, and was convertible into a fable not long after; but they delight in strong earthy expression, not mistakeable, coarsely true to the human body, and, though spoken among princes, equally fit and welcome to the mob." A similar characteristic imbues their poetry: "The poet nimbly recovers himself from every sally of the imagination. The English muse loves the farmyard, the lane, and market. She says, with De Stael, 'I tramp in the mire with wooden shoes, whenever they would force me into the clouds,' For, the Englishman has accurate perceptions; takes hold of things by the right end, and there is no slipperiness in his grasp." Emerson goes on, in his description of the literary tastes and abilities of the English, to say that the Englishman, "When he is intellectual, and a poet or philosopher, he carries the same hard truth and the same keen machinery into the mental sphere. His mind must stand on a fact." When an English writer desires to write as his native instincts direct, he uses "the frame, or skeleton, of Saxon words, and, when elevation or ornament is sought, to interweave Roman: but sparingly; nor is a sentence made of Roman words alone, without loss of strength."





It is advisable to speak in this connection of "The Times,"

The Papers and  
Politics

the greatest of newspapers published in England, and, in Emerson's day, the greatest of

all newspapers. He says of the English newspaper that it "stands in antagonism with the feudal institutions, and it is all the more beneficent succour against the secretive tendencies of a monarchy. The celebrated Lord Somers 'knew of no good law proposed and passed in his time, to which the public papers had not directed his attention.' There is no corner and no night. A relentless inquisition drags every secret to the day, turns the glare of this solar microscope on every malfeasance, so as to make the public a more terrible spy than any foreigner; and no weakness can be taken advantage of by an enemy, since the whole people are already forewarned." Just how great a part "The Times" plays in the life of the Englishman is accurately indicated by Emerson's statement as follows: "Here in England every day a chapter

Independence of  
The Papers

of Genesis, and a leader in the Times."

The people are attracted to the paper because it is independent and fearless; for this paper "attacks a Duke as readily as a policeman, and with the most provoking airs of condescension." The people never know what to expect from the paper: "they do not know, when they take it up, what their paper is going to say; but, above all, they like it "for the nationality and confidence of its tone."

Emerson found in England what he thought the best among all institutions: "a cultivated person, fitly surrounded by a happy home, 'with honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,'" All this



leads him to make the following boldly axiomatic statement, in the chapter "Result:" "England is the best of actual nations."

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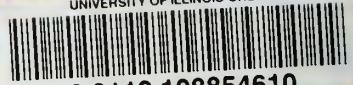
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